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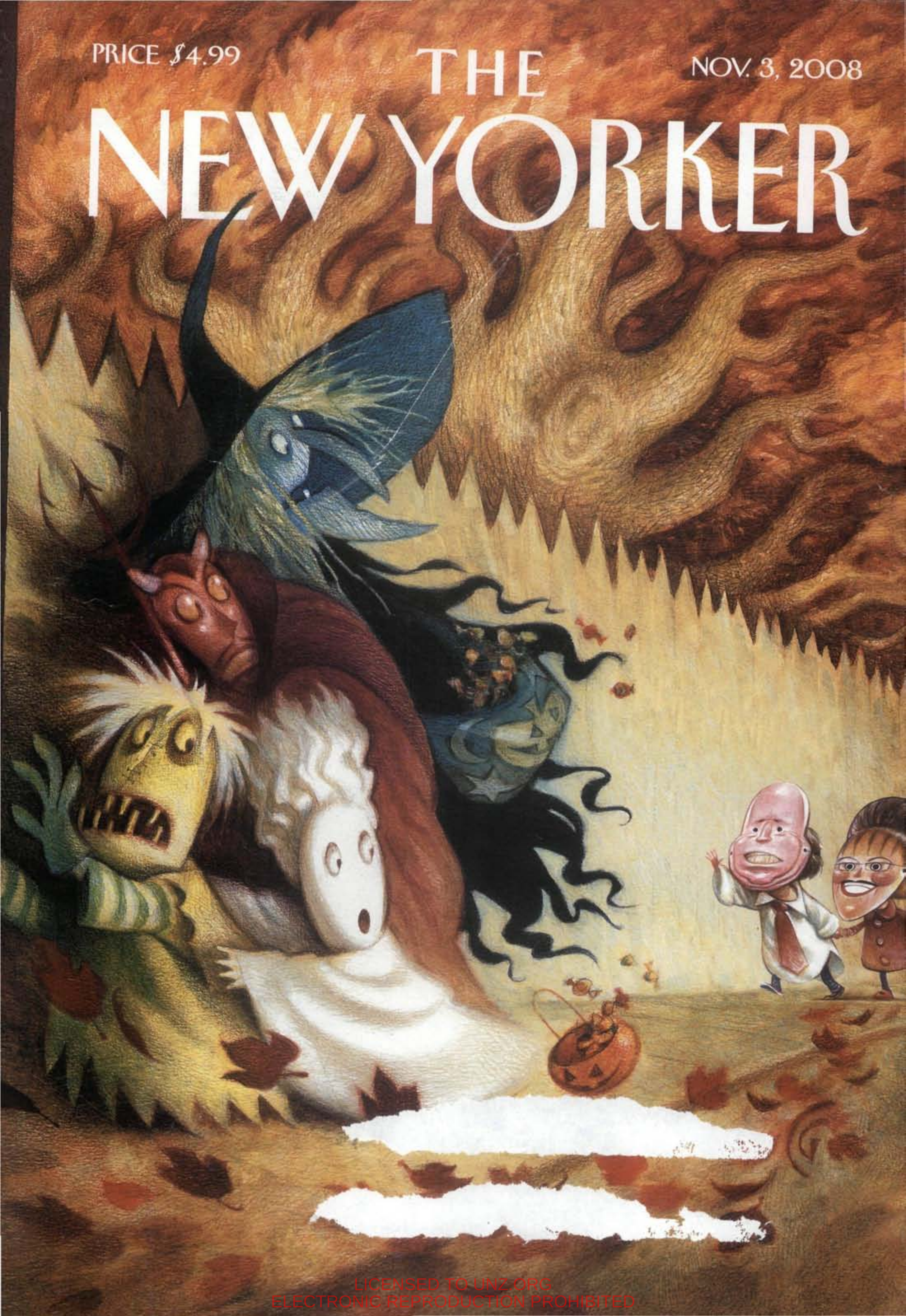
NOV. 3, 2008



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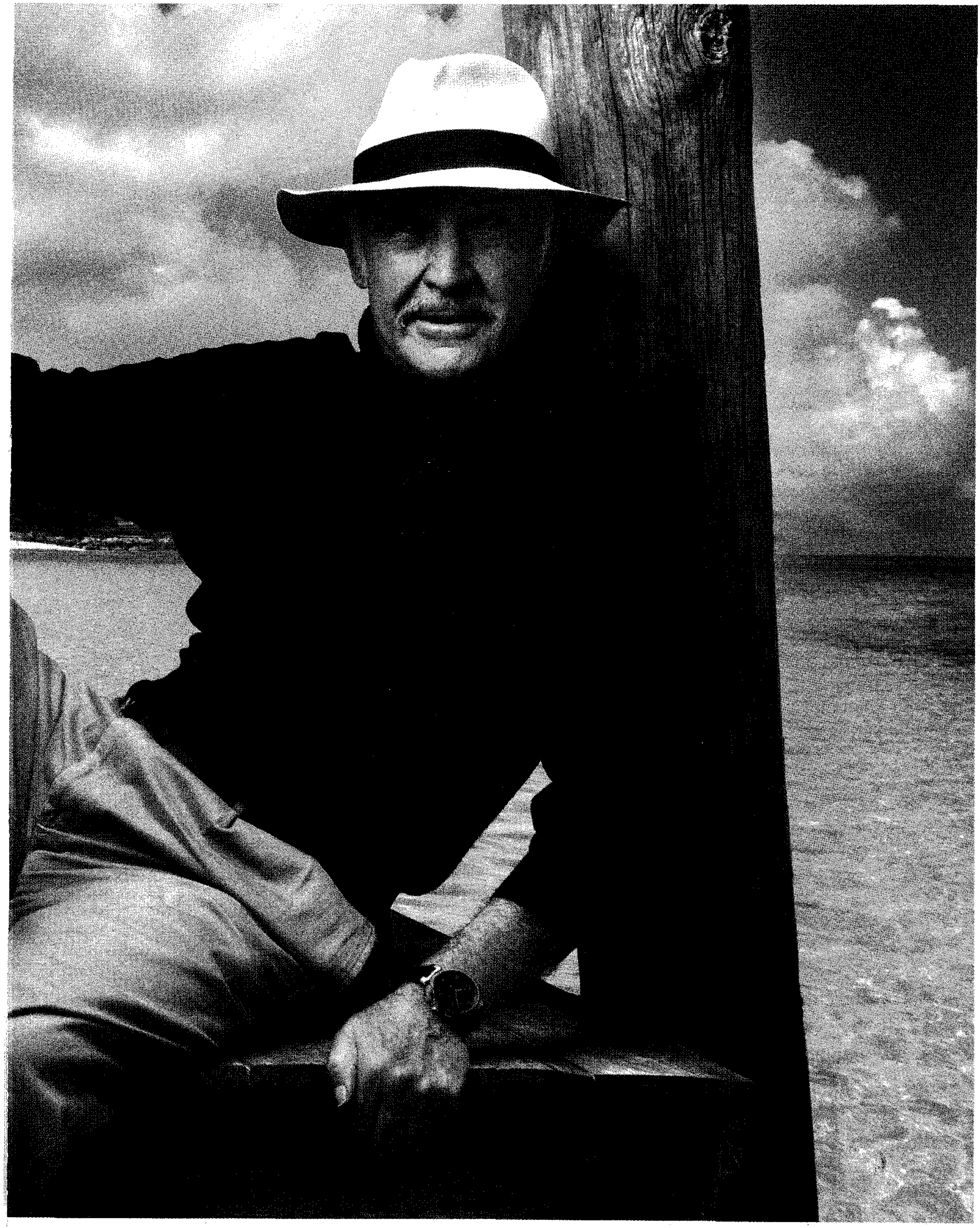

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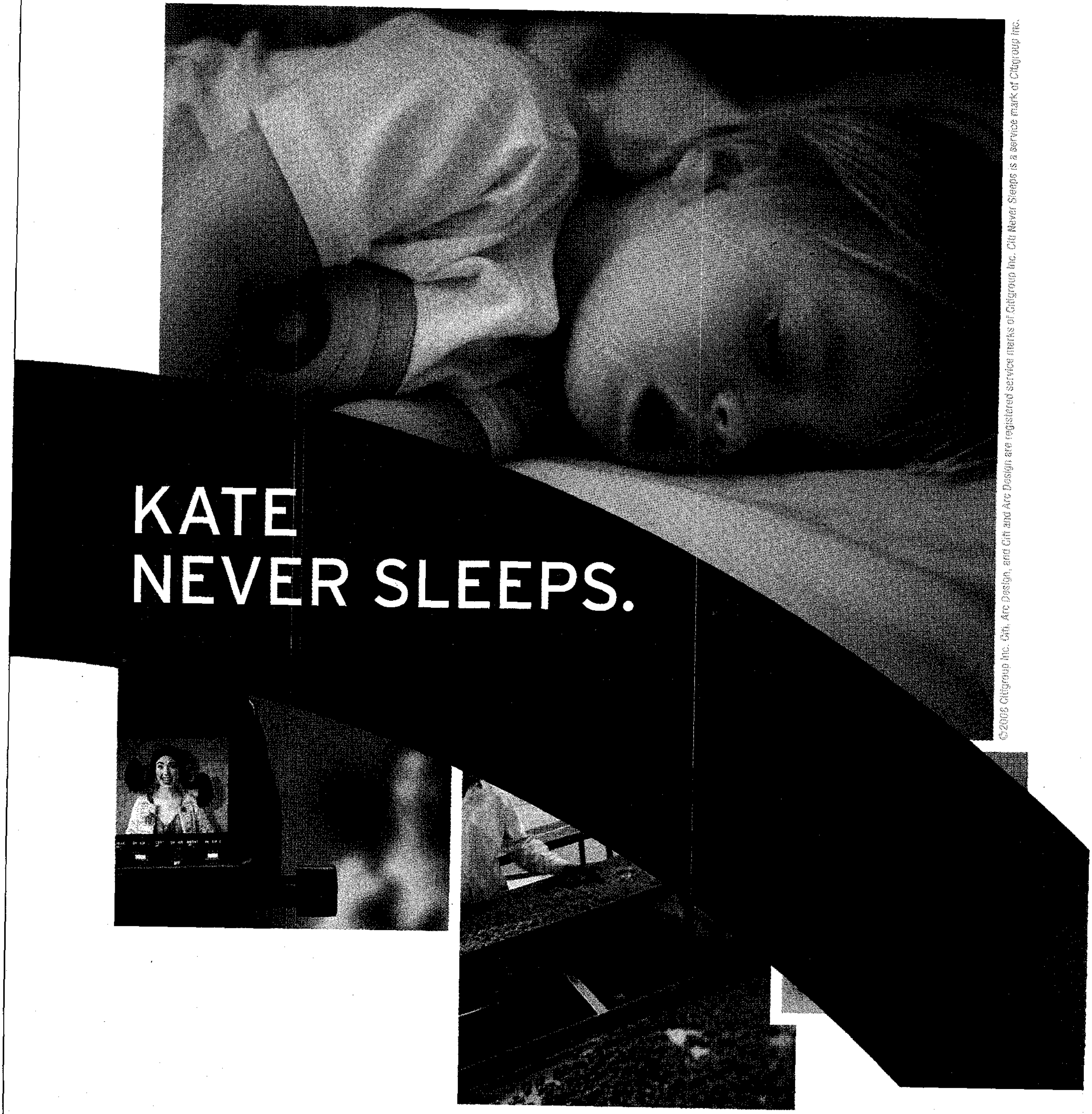
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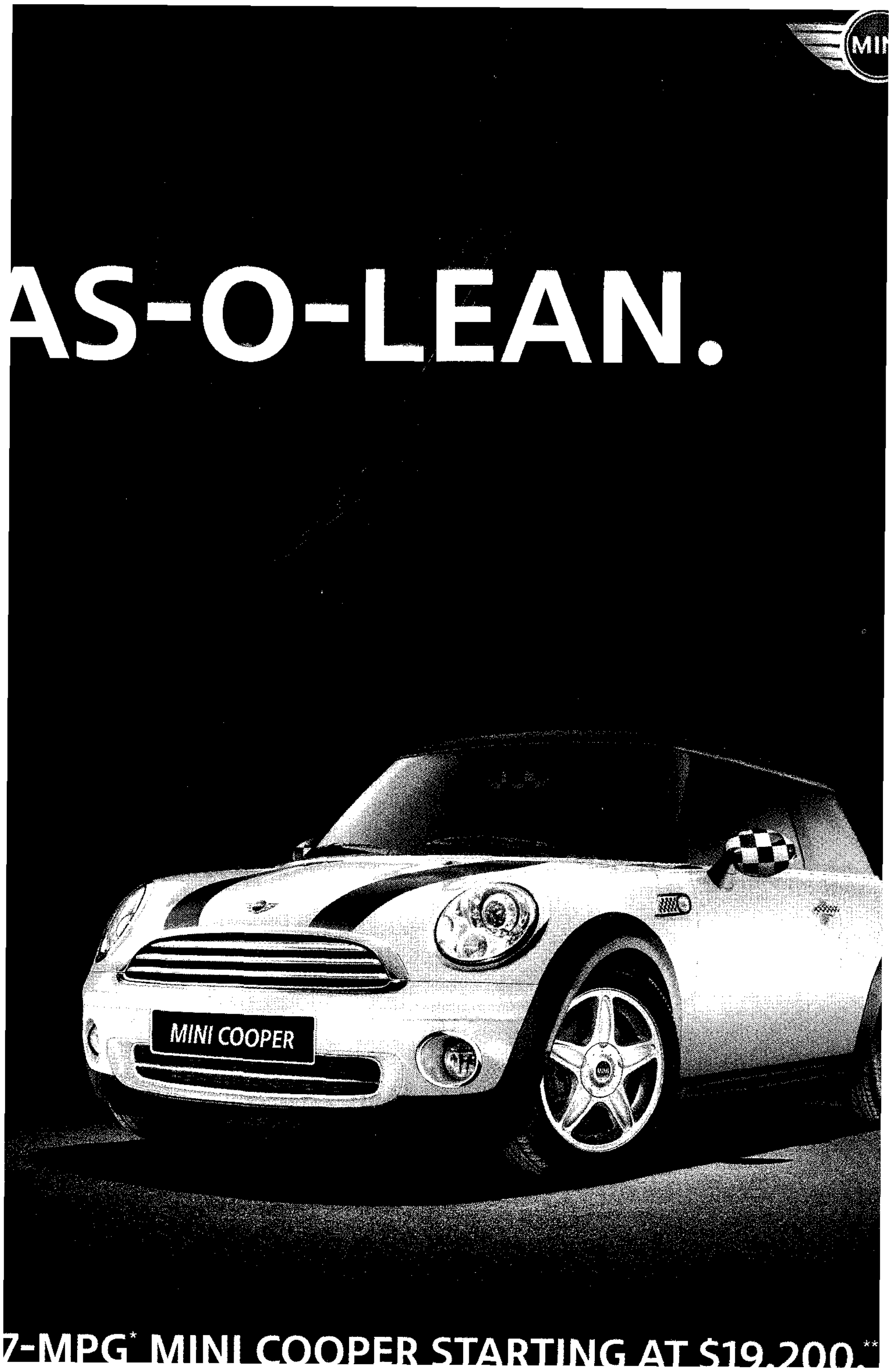

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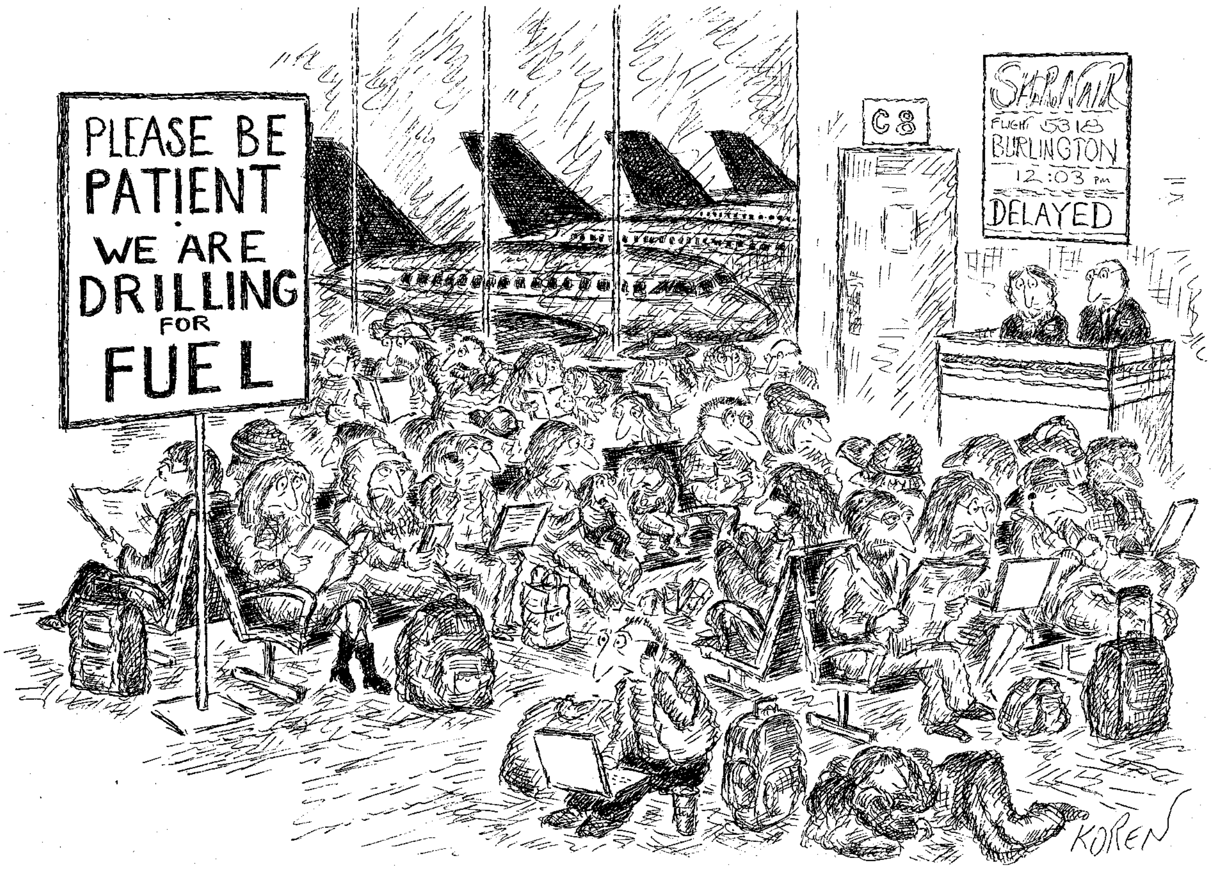
SPOTS *Joost Swarte*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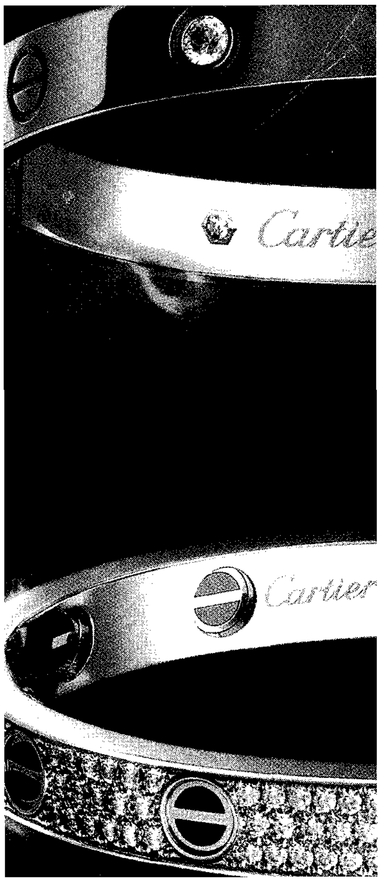

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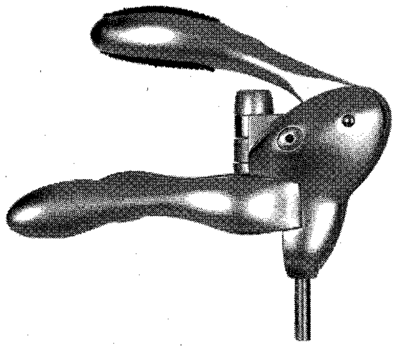

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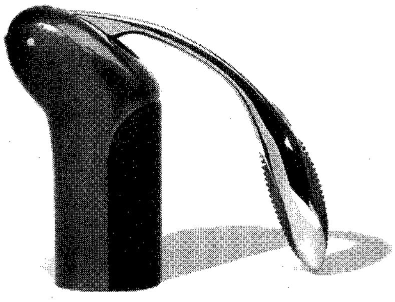

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CONTRIBUTORS

Connie Bruck ("Odd Man Out," p. 52) is a longtime staff writer.

John Seabrook (The Talk of the Town, p. 46) recently published "Flash of Genius and Other True Stories of Invention," one of which has been adapted into a feature film.

Alexander Stille ("Girls! Girls! Girls!," p. 70) is the San Paolo Professor of International Journalism at Columbia. His most recent book is "The Sack of Rome."

Tom Bissell ("The Grammar of Fun," p. 78), the author of "The Father of All Things" and "God Lives in St. Petersburg," is working on a travel book about the tombs of the Twelve Apostles.

Louise Erdrich (Fiction, p. 85) is the author of twelve novels, including "The Plague of Doves," which was published earlier this year.

Steve Brodner (Cartoon, p. 48; Sketchbook, p. 94) has created a series of films, The Naked Campaign, that can be seen at newyorker.com.

Bruce McCall ("Inside the Political Machine," p. 98) published his first children's book, "Marveltown," in September.

Margaret Talbot ("Red Sex, Blue Sex," p. 64), a staff writer, is a senior fellow at the New America Foundation.

W. S. Merwin (Poem, p. 86), a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, has published more than twenty books of poetry, including "Migration," which won a National Book Award. "The Shadow of Sirius" is his latest collection.

Aline, Sophie & R. Crumb ("Don't Talk with Yer Mouth Full," p. 102) are a family of artists. This is Sophie Crumb's début in *The New Yorker*.

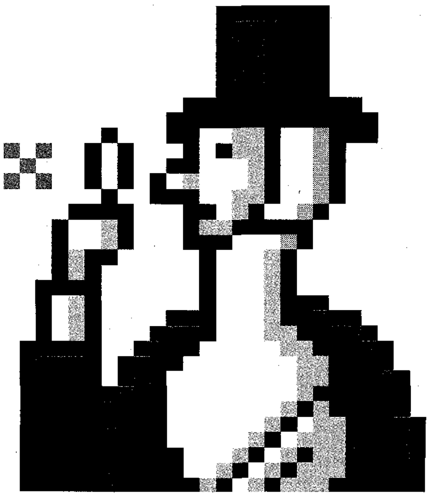
Mike Luckovich ("What I'll Miss About George W.," p. 96) is the editorial cartoonist for the Atlanta *Journal-Constitution*. He has won two Pulitzer Prizes for his work and is syndicated in a hundred and fifty newspapers.

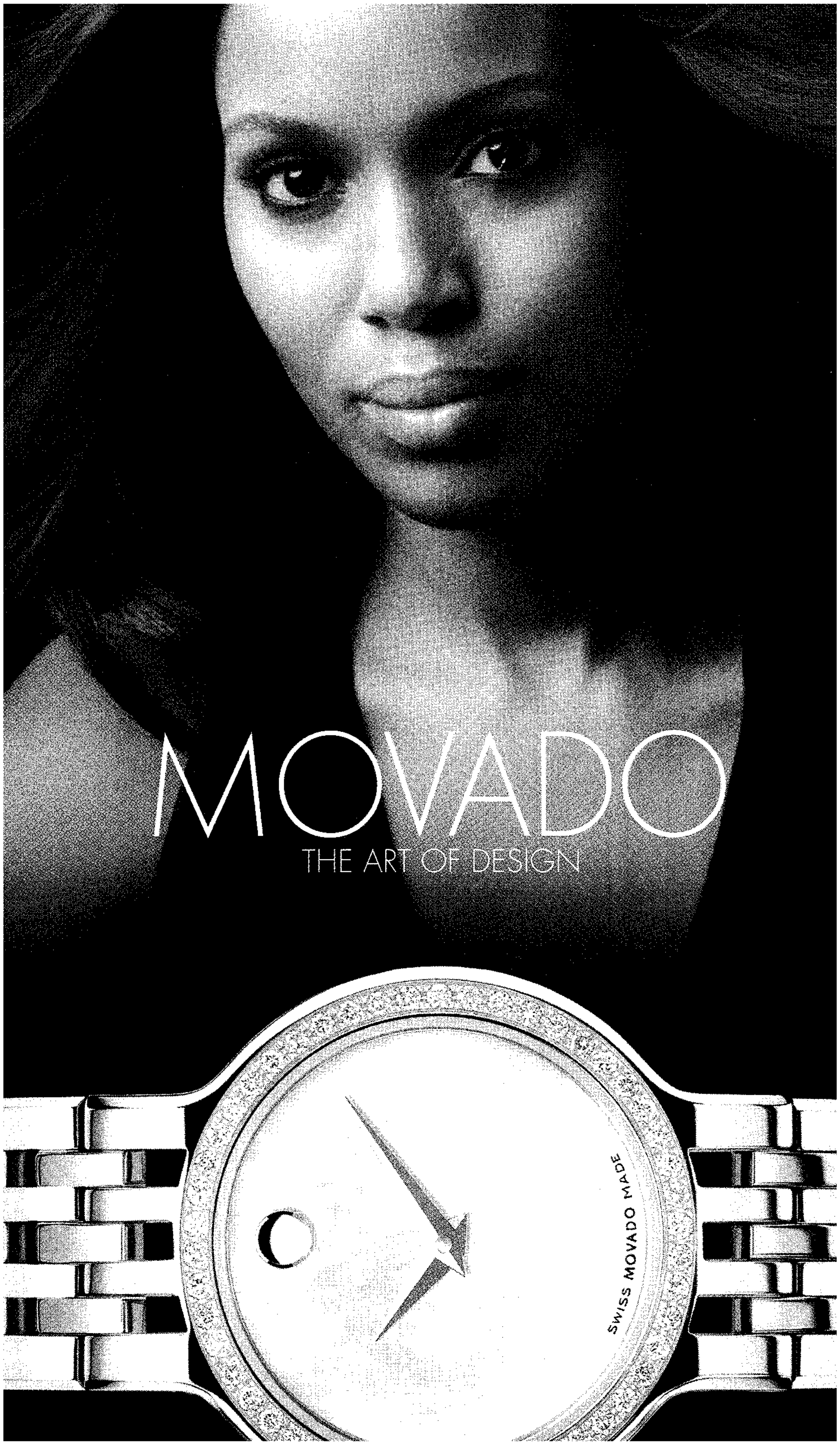
Dan Chiasson (Books, p. 106) is a poet and literary critic. His most recent book is "One Kind of Everything: Poem and Person in Contemporary America."

Carter Goodrich (Cover), an illustrator, has won many awards, including a 2007 ASIFA-Hollywood Annie Award for his work on "Ratatouille." His books include "A Creature Was Stirring" and "The Hermit Crab," which will come out in the spring.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

The Balance Sheet, a new blog by *James Surowiecki*. / More blogs: *Hendrik Hertzberg*, *George Packer*, and *Steve Coll* follow the Presidential race, plus the Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, and Goings On. / Audio: the Campaign Trail podcast, hosted by *Dorothy Wickenden*, and a visit to *Bruce McCall's* studio. / Video from the 2008 New Yorker Festival. / Ask the Author: *Robert Mankoff* takes questions about the Cartoon Issue. / From the archives: complete election coverage and thousands of film reviews. / Animated cartoons and the caption contest, with a browsable archive.

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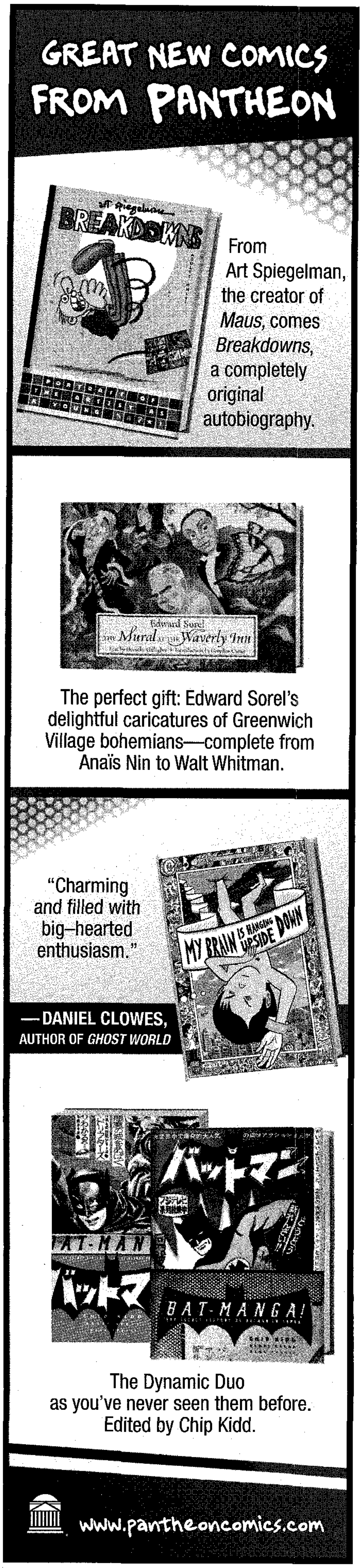
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TRAIL TALK

James Wood, in his criticism of the anti-intellectual spirit that has characterized much of the 2008 Republican Presidential campaign, astutely identifies the commercialized tone of John McCain's slogan "The Original Maverick" as being one that is "as close to a logo or a brand name as possible" ("Verbage," October 13th). The campaign's disregard for linguistic precision shows itself in the slogan's self-contradiction. Consider the origin of the word "maverick"—something unbranded. To brand oneself as the "unbrand" is hypocritical, manipulative, and just plain ludicrous. The empty originality of the McCain brand parallels its empty promise of change. Meanwhile, our national dialogue in the past months—and, indeed, over the past eight years—has devolved into one that is lacking in respect for both American candidates and audiences, for our values and intelligence, and, beyond that, for our language itself.

Rebecca R. Ruiz
New York City

MILL AND FREEDOM

Adam Gopnik, in his review of Richard Reeves's biography of John Stuart Mill, describes Mill's political thought as perhaps too optimistic to understand why some people might choose unfreedom over liberty, and too blinded by reason to imagine what tyrannies might be lurking on the horizon (A Critic at Large, October 6th). However, "On Liberty" and "The Subjection of Women" capture the enduring power of custom to blunt critical thinking and to inspire a popular hostility to dissent. Those texts were written not because Mill couldn't imagine people turning their back on freedom but because Mill knew all too well that they might. Moreover, Mill was an early observer of the transition to new forms of subjection and control that were taking place around him. In "On Liberty," he writes, "Society can and does execute its own mandates: and . . . it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself." "On Liberty" and (especially) "The Subjection of Women" might even be considered two of the first modern critiques of the formation and operation of unjust totalitarian power.

Jack Jackson
Fellow, Townsend Center for the Humanities
University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley, Calif.

FINDING THE MAJORITY

Jill Lepore, in looking at the origin of our voting system, calls the electoral college "an ill-begotten compromise" ("Rock, Paper, Scissors," October 13th). Like the rest of the Constitution, it was indeed a compromise, but perhaps not so "shoddy" after all. The framers were intensely conscious of John Locke's principle that only the will of a majority could make government legitimate, and Lepore is quite right that, in 1787, a popular vote of thousands (or millions) of voters "was all but inconceivable"—it would be highly unlikely to produce anything close to a majority. As it turned out, the Electoral College has failed only twice to deliver a majority of votes to one candidate (in 1800 and in 1824), but the fifteen Presidents who fell short of a majority of popular votes include Lincoln, Wilson, Truman, Kennedy, Clinton, and—famously—George W. Bush. It's hard to imagine Lincoln rallying a skeptical Union to fight the Civil War on his claim to be the choice of less than forty per cent of the people, but even the slave-holding border states were willing to acknowledge a President elected over three opponents by a clear majority of electoral votes.

Andrew Browning
Portland, Ore.

•

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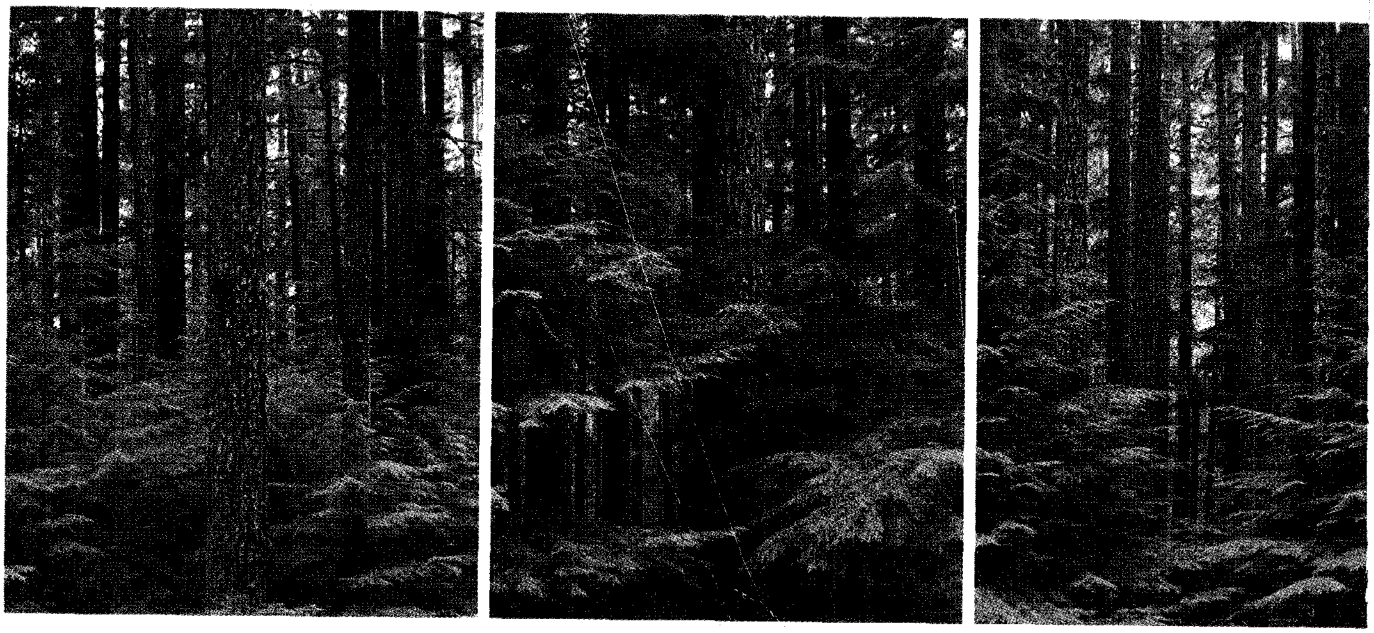

TRIPTYCH (L. TO R.): ITHAKA VIII, IX, X, 2008 ©ALEXANDRA HEDISON

Seeing the Forest Through a Tree

For the work in "Ithaka," her current exhibition, Los Angeles-based photographer Alexandra Hedison used a four-by-five camera to frame large-format images with the intimacy of portraits in Washington State's Olympic National Forest, the largest temperate rain forest in North America. The shooting was necessarily deliberate, and the forest, Hedison recalls, "required that respect." The resulting oversized prints (five by six and a half feet) draw viewers into the photographer's meditative perspective.

In an interview with the exhibition's curator, Amélie Sourget, Hedison talks about the process of making portraits in an environment where "the continuous rain produces both constant new life and thick carpets of decay."

Sourget: What was the challenge of "portraiture"?
Hedison: I had to find ways to record the momentum that surrounded me. When you look at a great portrait by someone like Richard Avedon, you see the person's body language in an isolated space, and that gives you an idea of who they are. But in the forest nothing is isolated—one species of tree grows out of another in a complete tangle of old and new. So I felt instinctively that the "language" of the portraits here had to express the interaction.

Sourget: How did you choose your subjects?
Hedison: The first photos I took focused on what I found haunting and humbling in the chaos—ghostlike trees draped in moss, a path like an obstacle course of ferns and fallen branches. After many days of searching, I became surer that the actual subject was the passage of time, and I sought ways to express this. One was to photograph the trees as personalities at different stages of the forest's life. This became the triptych that for me encapsulates the journey I took.

Sourget: How so?
Hedison: In the first portrait, one hemlock is boldly at the center. In the second, the tree at the center is obscured by new growth. And in the third, it fades from view. This is the balance in the endless momentum, and in it I saw the limits of my own time span.

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Alexandra Hedison's exhibition is at New York's Gallery 28, 608 West 28th Street, from October 29th–November 8th.
For more information, go to www.hedison.com.

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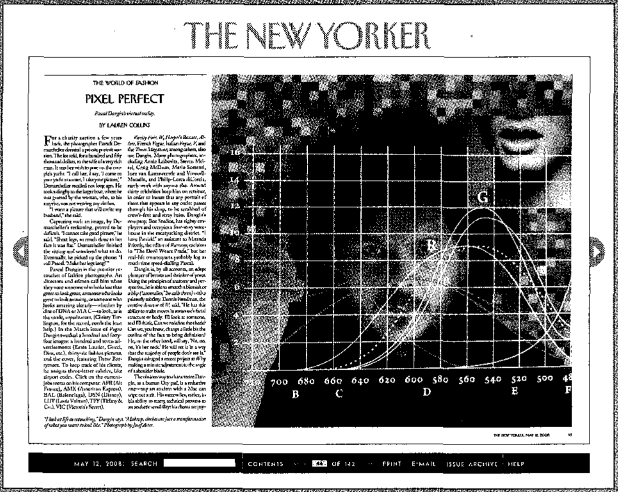
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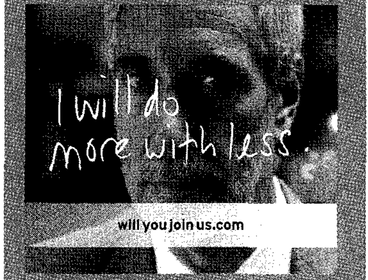
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"Nightmare: Bad Dreams Come True," at CSV Cultural Center. Photograph by Gus Powell.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
MAD MEN

John Doyle, who directed a spectacular, darkly moving production of Stephen Sondheim's "Sweeney Todd," two years ago, returns to the Sondheim œuvre. At the Public, Doyle directs the New York première of "Road Show," a musical that has evolved through a variety of iterations (and four titles) in the past ten years. Michael Cerveris and Alexander Gemignani star as two brothers trying to strike it rich in early-twentieth-century America. (See page 18.)

NIGHT LIFE
SOLO STAR

Twenty years ago, the Malian musician Toumani Diabaté's début album, "Kaira," put the kora, a West African twenty-one-string harp, on the map as a solo instrument. Since then, Diabaté has led a remarkable ensemble, the Symmetric Orchestra, and performed with Western pop and leading jazz musicians. Earlier this year, he came out with a second solo album, "The Mandé Variations," and this week the World Music Institute brings him to town for a performance. (See page 22.)

ART
MASCULINE FEMININE

"Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection," at the Brooklyn Museum, includes works by the British provocateur Tracey Emin and the Americans Kiki Smith and Kara Walker. Somewhat less expected is a piece by a man—Nayland Blake's cotton sculpture of a rabbit, which tweaks stereotypes about gender. (See page 24.)

MOVIES
CINEMATO-VIBRATO

Walter Reade kicks off "Cinematic Opera/Operatic Cinema" with Sergei Eisenstein's "Ivan the Terrible," Parts 1 and 2 (which Pauline Kael described as "opera without singers"); the screening will be introduced by the British film historian Ian Christie. The series also includes Ingmar Bergman's "The Magic Flute" and Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's "Moses and Aaron," and will conclude with a panel discussion between the directors Atom Egoyan and Julie Taymor. (See page 39.)

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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AMERICAN BUFFALO
Robert Falls directs a revival of David Mamet's 1976 play, about two junk-store habitués who involve a teen-ager in their plan to steal a coin collection. Cedric the Entertainer, Haley Joel Osment, and John Leguizamo star. Previews begin Oct. 31. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

BACK BACK BACK
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a new play by Itamar Moses ("The Four of Us"), about three baseball players who are involved in a steroid-use investigation. Daniel Aukin directs. Previews begin Oct. 30. (City Center, Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

BEACHWOOD DRIVE
The world première of a drama by Steven Leigh Morris, directed by Alan Mandell, about a Ukrainian woman who is brought to the United States by Russian mobsters who run a prostitution ring. Opens Oct. 29. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL
Stephen Daldry directs the musical based on the movie, about a working-class boy who discovers a love for ballet. Elton John wrote the music, and Lee Hall wrote the book and lyrics. In previews. (Imperial, 240 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

BURY THE DEAD
Transport Group presents this 1936 drama by Irwin Shaw, about a group of soldiers who rise from the dead. Previews begin Oct. 31. (Connelly, 220 E. 4th St. 212-352-3101.)

DIVIDING THE ESTATE
Horton Foote's comedy about a Texas family moves to Broadway after a run in 2006 at Primary Stages. Elizabeth Ashley, Arthur French, Hallie Foote, Penny Fuller, and Gerald McRaney star. Michael Wilson directs. In previews. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

FARRAGUT NORTH
At Atlantic Theatre Company, Doug Hughes directs the world première of Beau Willimon's new drama, about a young press secretary for an aspiring Presidential candidate. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

THE FOOTAGE
At the Flea, a drama written by Joshua Scher and directed by Claudia Zelevansky, about the effects of an online role-playing game on a group of friends. In previews. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

THE GRAND INQUISITOR
At New York Theatre Workshop, an adaptation, by Marie-Hélène Estienne, of the Inquisitor section of "The Brothers Karamazov." Peter Brook directs this C.I.C.T./Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord production, copresented by Theatre for a New Audience. Opens Oct. 29. (79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

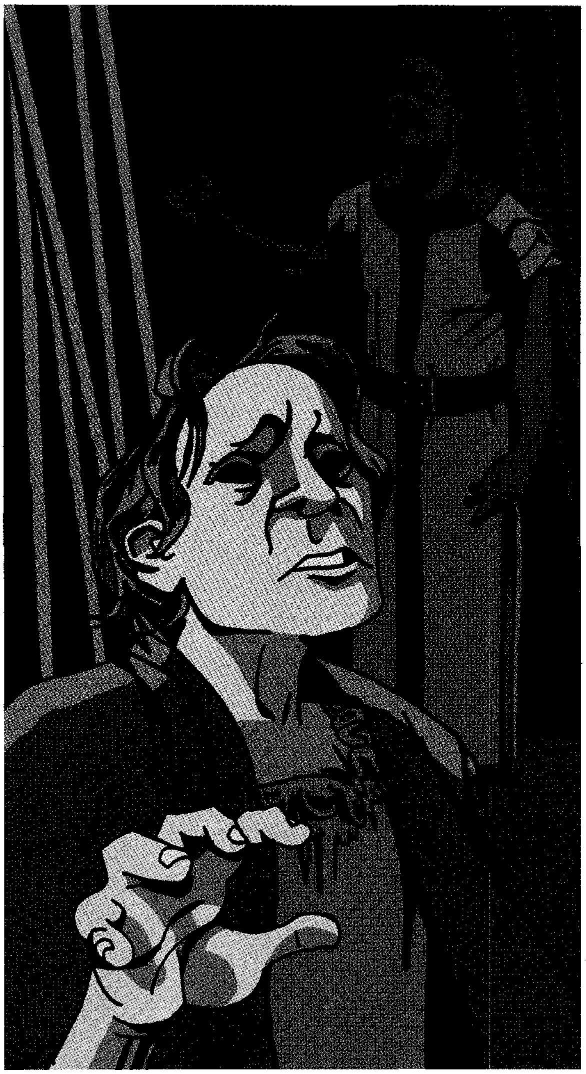
THE LANGUAGE OF TREES
The world première of a play by Steven Levenson, about an American translator who goes to a war zone in the Middle East, leaving his wife and son in the hands of a friendly neighbor. Alex Timbers directs. Opens Oct. 29. (Roundabout Underground, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

MEETING WITH BODHISATTVA
At BAM, U Theatre presents a work devoted to Buddhist themes. Liu Ruo-Yu directs. Oct. 29-Nov. 1. (Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100.)

THE MIDDLE AGES
Theater Breaking Through Barriers kicks off its season with a social comedy by A. R. Gurney. In previews. Opens Nov. 2. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

MINDGAME
Anthony Horowitz wrote this thriller, about a crime writer who travels to an insane asylum to interview a serial killer. Ken Russell (who directed the film "Tommy") makes his New York stage directorial début. Keith Carradine stars. In previews. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

MOUTH TO MOUTH
The New Group opens its season with the U.S. première of a new play by Kevin Elyot, about a gay writer living with AIDS, and his friend, a woman who is very attached to her teen-age son. Mark Brokaw directs. In previews. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)



At the Pearl, Shepard Sobel directs "The Oedipus Cycle."

JASHAR AWAN

ROAD SHOW
John Doyle directs the New York première of a musical by Stephen Sondheim (music and lyrics) and John Weidman (book), about brothers who start out in the Alaska gold rush and end up participating in the Florida real-estate boom of the thirties. Michael Cerveris and Alexander Gemignani star. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

SATURN RETURNS
Noah Haidle wrote this play, in which a radiologist (played by three different actors) confronts three women at various stages of his life. In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

SHOGUN MACBETH
Pan Asian Repertory Theatre launches its season with this adaptation, by John R. Briggs, of the Shakespeare tragedy. Directed by Ernest Abuba, with choreography by Sachiyo Ito. Previews begin Nov. 4. (Julia Miles, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

SLEEPWALK WITH ME
Mike Birbiglia wrote and stars in this new comedy, about the experiences of a chronic somnambulist. Seth Barrish directs. In previews. (Bleecker Street Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 212-239-6200.)

STREAMERS
Roundabout Theatre Company presents David Rabe's drama from 1976, set in 1965, about four soldiers in boot camp in Virginia, waiting to be deployed to Vietnam. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

WHAT'S THAT SMELL: THE MUSIC OF JACOB STERLING
David Pittu's musical satire, about a self-important composer-lyricist, transfers to New World Stages. Opens Nov. 1. (340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

ALL MY SONS
In Arthur Miller's 1947 play, Kate (Dianne Wiest) charges around the yard of the house that she shares with her husband, Joe (John Lithgow), and their son Chris (Patrick Wilson), administering advice and grape juice like the capable, postwar American mom that she feels she must be, if only to keep up appearances. But she is not happy; her other son, Larry, an Air Force pilot, has failed to return from a mission in the Pacific. Larry's girlfriend, Ann Deever (Katie Holmes), has no illusions about Larry's return, and has already displaced her affections to Chris. Guilt, buried secrets, miscarriages of justice—the air of "All My Sons" is thick with the pretense that none of this is happening, which requires the actors to play two parts at once. Wiest and Lithgow are brilliant at this kind of double-playing. It's a stretch to imagine anyone doing a better job with it than the director, Simon McBurney, does here. He draws out the play's emotional and intellectual content by removing it from its naturalistic fustiness. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/27/08.) (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE ATHEIST
In Ronan Noone's one-man show, at the intimate Barrow Street Theatre, Augustine Early (Campbell Scott), a handsome sociopath in an ill-fitting suit, sets up a video camera and spends the next two hours recording his confession: turns out he has joyfully and systematically ruined the lives of several people in his redneck town in order to get "famous." What makes it almost worth sitting through Early's ably written yet less than meaningful ramblings—about his job as an unethical reporter, a girlfriend who likes gymnastic bathroom sex, and a Peeping Tom congressman with a pile of homemade porn and an attractive, virgin wife—is the chance to see Scott, an accomplished actor working wholeheartedly to hold up his end of the deal. Directed by Justin Waldman. (27 Barrow St. 212-352-3101.)

BLASTED
The forceful and always daring SoHo Rep mounts the long-awaited New York première of the late Sarah Kane's groundbreaking and excruciating drama, in which the attempts of an aging journalist (Reed Birney) to seduce a dim-witted young girl (Marin Ireland) quickly spiral into an increasingly nightmarish series of events. The director, Sarah Benson, has assembled a topnotch team of designers and a cast of equally brilliant actors; the results are simultaneously devastating and sublime. (46 Walker St. 212-352-3101.)

A BODY OF WATER
One morning, a middle-aged man and woman wake up in a quiet country house stocked with the food they like to eat and clothes that fit them, but their memories have been completely wiped clean. It's like an acid trip—frightening, a little funny, and somewhat painful. Though each is unfamiliar to the other,

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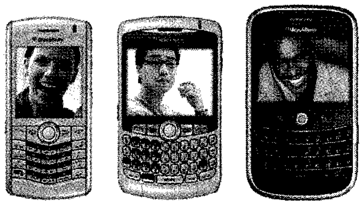

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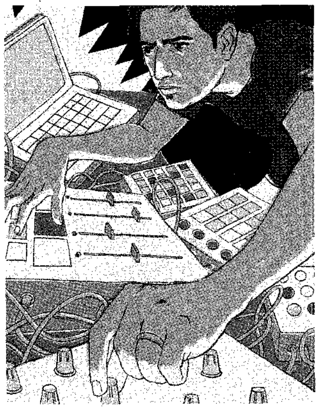
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
REGULAR GUI

The Brazilian electronic musician Gui Boratto makes work that is stranded, contentedly, between worlds. Parts of his album, "Chromophobia," are of a piece with the other music released on his German label, Kompakt: lapidary electronic sounds that accrete slowly and achieve the propulsion of dance music while retaining detail. But Boratto also uses generous doses of guitar, keyboard, and voice to bring his work closer to rock or pop. Although he sometimes tours with drummers and other musicians, Boratto will be visiting New York this time with just a laptop, various controllers, and a drum machine. His appearance at Cielo on Oct. 28 could be one of the better live shows of the fall. The sound system there, designed by Funktion One, is capable of producing clear, heavy sound that is not overbearing. Boratto's music will work equally well as a weave of abstract dance tracks and as a series of slightly elongated, deconstructed pop songs. Nobody on the dance floor will feel stranded.



—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

it doesn't seem impossible that the pair might be married, if only they could remember (after all, they were naked when they awoke, his hand on her breast). The New York première of Lee Blessing's first-class drama studies how we are connected, apart from our memories. Christine Lahti and Michael Cristofer expertly ride the roller coaster of emotions of people trying to find a reference point and failing. Laura Odeh, as a young woman who arrives knowing all about the couple and yet tortures them with contradictory stories of what might have brought them to their current state, is convincingly exasperating, exasperated, and cruel. Directed by Maria Mileaf. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

BOYS' LIFE
Howard Korder's Pulitzer Prize-nominated play, from 1988, has not aged well, and this awkward, misguided revival isn't doing it any favors. In a nameless American city in the late nineteen-eighties, three old friends (Rhys Coiro, Peter Scanavino, and Jason Biggs) stumble through various sexual relationships and casual substance-abuse problems as they head toward three different breeds of manhood. Along the way, there's a lot of neurotic griping about unfulfilled expectations and the burdens of the Y chromosome. Michael Greif directs the cast of young actors to play every line for laughs, robbing the script of any texture that might lead to an audience's emotional investment in the characters. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

CLAY
A manipulative father, a suicidal mother, a deformed Brooklyn beatboxer, and a troubled white kid turned rapper are all rendered with surprising precision and pathos by the twenty-four-year-old Matt Sax in this ambitious and deeply entertaining solo hip-hop musical about the transformative power of personal expression. Under the astute direction of Eric Rosen, Sax takes the audience through the life of Clifford, a product of a broken Westchester home, from the wide-eyed adolescent testifying in divorce court to the unsure but eventually unflinching hip-hop prodigy. A couple of vital but hyperbolic plot points strain credulity at times, and the final scenes stray a bit too far into Oedipal country, but Sax's energetic performance and winning rhymes keep the evening consistently enthralling. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

THE FOURPOSTER
Jan de Hartog's play from 1952, revived by the Keen Company, is a portrait of a marriage across a span of thirty-five years, from the bashful wedding night, in 1890, to wistful middle age. De Hartog, who wrote the play in Holland while in hiding from the Nazis, is less interested in a tangled family drama than in mugging through the life cycle. The play, like the Everycouple it depicts, skirts real intimacy, sketching broad scenarios to which the actors must bring a personal touch. In the roles originated by Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy, Todd Weeks and Jessica Dickey have difficulty making the characters their own, playing into the quaintness of the dialogue rather than creating detailed studies. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

IF YOU SEE SOMETHING SAY SOMETHING
Mike Daisey presents a monologue about the Department of Homeland Security. Jean-Michele Gregory directs. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

LOVE CHILD
Primary Stages presents a comedy written and performed by Daniel Jenkins and Robert Stanton, about the opening night of a play whose audience is so affected by the work that they feel moved to respond to the actors during the performance. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

NIGHTMARE: BAD DREAMS COME TRUE
The organizers of this annual haunted house polled thousands of people about their nightmares and turned the best ones into scary tableaux. (CSV Cultural Center, 107 Suffolk St. 212-352-3101.)

THE OEDIPUS CYCLE
Shepard Sobel directs the world première of Peter Constantine's translation of the Sophocles plays. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

SPEED-THE-PLOW
Raúl Esparza, Elisabeth Moss, and Jeremy Piven star in David Mamet's play about the dark side of the film industry. Neil Pepe directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

SPIN
The StageFARM presents a series of short plays by Adam Rapp, Gina Gionfriddo, Judith Thompson, Elizabeth Meriwether, and Mark Schultz. Alex Kilgore and Evan Cabnet direct. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200.)

Also Playing

ABSINTHE: Spiegeltent, South Street Seaport, Pier 17. 212-279-4200. Through Nov. 2. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BLACK WATCH:** St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **EQUUS:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **FIFTY WORDS:** Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200. **THE GLASS CAGE:** Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **IN CONFLICT:** Culture Project, 27 Barrow St. 212-315-0231. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **IRENA'S VOW:** Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Ave. 212-352-3101. Through Nov. 2. **KINDNESS:** Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Nov. 2. **A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **THE SEAGULL:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **TO BE OR NOT TO BE:** Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Oct. 31: The **Misfits,** the pride of Lodi, New Jersey, are a seminal punk-rock outfit whose preoccupation with horror and gore teeters between the campy and the creepy. The current lineup features the former Black Flag member Dez Cadena on vocals. Nov. 1: Best known for his recent fractious stint in Guns N' Roses, the guitar wizard **Buckethead** (who wears a KFC bucket on his head, as well as a mask and a yellow raincoat) is one of the more compelling and mysterious figures in modern experimental music.

BLENDER THEATRE AT GRAMERCY
127 E. 23rd St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 29-31: **"Zappa Plays Zappa."** A Zappa show in New York on Halloween has been a tradition since 1977, when Frank led a post-Mothers band in an appearance at the Palladium. Frank, who died in 1993, cannot be replaced, but his son Dweezil is a hell of a guitarist himself, and his group has the power to create plenty of complex electrified freak-outs. Nov. 1: Randy Cordero, a Bay Area singer who goes by the name Surreal Neil, leads **Super Diamond,** a long-running and extremely successful outfit that pays tribute to Neil Diamond.

CIELO
18 Little W. 12th St. (212-645-5700)—Oct. 28: The Brazilian musical alchemist **Gui Boratto.**

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Oct: 29: The duo **Uh Huh Her** (the name is from a PJ Harvey album) comprises the singer and multi-instrumentalist Camila Grey and the musician and actress Leisha Hailey, who traffic in throbbing synth pop that's destined to make mascara run. Oct. 31: **Super Diamond** (see the Blender Theatre). Nov. 3: The **Sisters of Mercy** are arguably the preëminent British gothic-rock band, beloved for their relentlessly gloomy aesthetic. Never ones to submit weakly to industry convention, the Sisters

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haven't released a proper album of new material since "Vision Thing," in 1990. Still, their sporadic Stateside appearances always seem to coax their (now aging) black-clad acolytes from their basement dwellings.

GRAND BALLROOM
Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 30: The **Last Shadow Puppets.** Recently, the Englishmen Alex Turner and Miles Kane holed up in a French farmhouse and recorded an album together. The pair were no babes in the woods (Turner fronts the wildly successful and antic Arctic Monkeys, and Kane has his own band, the Rascals), and the album, "The Age of the Understatement," stormed the U.K. charts. What's surprising, though, is how honest the tender, sixties-sounding, spy-thriller-esque songs are. The pair will be backed by an orchestra.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Nov. 1-2: **"Weimar New York,"** a variety show created and produced by Earl Dax, offers music, burlesque, and other acts by downtown divas and drag queens. The two-night engagement includes performances by, among others, Gina Leishman, Penny Arcade, and Narcissister. Nov. 3: **Freestyle Love Supreme,** a hip-hop improv collective of talented young musicians and actors (including Lin-Manuel Miranda, the composer, lyricist, and star of the Tony-winning Broadway musical "In the Heights"). Nov. 3-4: The Israeli-born singer-songwriter **Keren Ann**—she's partly based in Paris and was nominated earlier in the year for two Victoires de la Musique, the French equivalent of Grammys—performs duos with the trumpet player **Avishai Cohen.**

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3132)—Nov. 2: The semi-legendary sludge-rock trio **Killdozer** is back together and on tour for the first time in twelve years. Formed in the early eighties, in Madison, Wisconsin, the group was defiantly primitive (its début album was titled "Intellectuals Are the Shoeshine Boys of the Ruling Elite") and its fearsome, murky sound and slow tempos helped pave the way for grunge. The group covers Midwestern subjects (the fifties Wisconsin serial killer Ed Gein, deer hunting) in a wry and sardonic fashion.

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-653-1703)—Oct. 29: The **Dexter Romweber Duo.** The name of the North Carolina singer-songwriter-guitarist Romweber's old band, Flat Duo Jets, fairly screamed rock and roll. The name of his new outfit might call to mind a nerdy chamber-music group, but the duo—the other member is Dexter's sister Sara Romweber, on drums—blasts psycho-surf-rockabilly-garage rock for all it's worth. Jack White, who knows something about intergender power twosomes, cites Romweber as a huge influence and calls him "one of the best-kept secrets of the rock-and-roll underground."

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Nov. 1: The Omaha-based indie-folk band **Neva Dinova.** Nov. 2: The **Wildhearts.** In the early nineties, this bedraggled group of cheeky British hooligans fused the best of punk, heavy metal, and hard rock into a hook-laden formula. Yet they met with very little commercial success. The band is touring small clubs for the fifteenth anniversary of its début album, "Earth vs. the Wildhearts." In a more perfect world, they'd be playing stadiums and advocating for the relief of Third World debt.

Daniel Bernard Roumain performs at BAM's Harvey Theatre.

SUSANNA HOWE

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-570-3949)—Oct. 31: The Sarah Lawrence grad and sixties girl-group icon **Lesley Gore** drops by the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium for an intimate set of her own songs and pop standards by John Lennon, Gershwin, and the Beach Boys. A suburban Jersey girl, Gore was discovered when she was sixteen, by Quincy Jones, and the two pulled her first and biggest hit, the Phil Spector-ish "It's My Party," from a stack of more than two hundred demos. Gore, now sixty-two, is still sprightly and energetic, and her bright voice has the same thin smile it's always had. Nov. 1: **Patti Smith** returns to the auditorium, a favorite room, for a stripped-down performance celebrating the Day of the Dead. For this show, she'll be backed only by her children—her daughter, Jesse, on piano, and her son, Jackson, on guitar. Between songs, expect a few riffs on the election and Mexican saints from this religiously inclined singer and lapsed Naderite.

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Oct. 31: **MGMT** is Andrew VanWyngarden and Ben Goldwasser, friends from Wesleyan who have hit the big time with alarming speed. Just a few years ago, they were entertaining campus friends with their broad taste in music, and since then they've signed a major-label deal, released an album of trippy and utterly charming electro-pop, "Oracular Spectacular," and captured the media spotlight.

92Y TRIBECA
200 Hudson St., at Canal St. (212-601-1000)—Nov. 1: The actor and comedian **Harry Shearer** (who played the aging rock star Derek Smalls in "This Is Spinal Tap," the 1984 mockumentary, which he also co-wrote) enters millions of households weekly as the voice of Ned Flanders, Reverend Lovejoy, and more than a dozen other characters on "The Simpsons." He's also a highly satirical singer-songwriter. His latest release, "Songs of the Bushmen," is a musical "homage" to key players in the outgoing Administration, pairing the subject of each song with an appropriate genre. For this preëlection show, Shearer and his backing band, the High-Value Detainees, will be joined by the Welsh singer **Judith Owen,** who is also his wife.

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 31-Nov. 3: When the Grateful Dead was in full jam mode, with the guitars wailing, the drums pounding, and the meter up for grabs, the melody could frequently be found in **Phil Lesh's** sweet, fluid bass lines. His latest band, featuring the young singer-songwriter Jackie Greene and the jack-of-all-strings Larry Campbell (a veteran of Bob Dylan's never-ending tour), settles in for a fourteen-date stand. Through Nov. 18.

TOWN HALL
123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—Oct. 28-29: **Joan Baez.** It's been fifty years since her career began, with a residency at Boston's Club 47, and she's celebrating with an extensive tour behind her new album, "Day After Tomorrow," produced by Steve Earle. Her vocal range may be slightly less stratospheric than it was in her folky days, but her pure intonation, commitment, and good humor survive intact.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Oct. 30: **MGMT** (see the Music Hall of Williamsburg). Nov. 1: At a series of house parties in Manchester, England, Katie White and Jules De Martino put some serious electronics and infectious guitar and vocal riffs in front of a heavy beat, and struck gold as the **Ting Tings.** The name comes from the Mandarin word for "bandstand."

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
Nov. 2: For nearly two decades, the Malian master musician **Toumani Diabaté** and his Symmetric Orchestra have been performing epically long sets on Fridays at the Hogan Club, in Bamako, combining contemporary improvisation with the sonic riches of the Mandé empire. Diabaté is one of the world's foremost players of the kora, a twenty-one-string harp, and recently he's been experimenting with the instrument, tinkering with its tuning and its construction; the results can be heard on his new solo album, "The Mandé Variations." Live, the deeply meditative compositions promise to be quite stirring. (Skirball Center, New York University, 566 LaGuardia Pl., at Washington Sq. S. For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—The celebrated Italian pianist **Enrico Pieranunzi** hooks up with A-list players on his Stateside visits. Oct. 29-30: He's joined by the electric bassist **Steve Swallow** and the drummer **Paul Motian.** Oct. 31-Nov. 1: **Paquito D'Rivera, Diego Urcola, John Patitucci,** and **Antonio Sanchez** round out Pieranunzi's Latin Quintet.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Oct. 29-30: From mainstream jazz vibraphonist to R. & B. hitmaker to charts orphan and rediscovered funk progenitor, **Roy Ayers** has been there and back. Nov. 1-2: **Tuck and Patti.** Tuck Andress plays guitar—lots of it—and Patti Cathcart sings; together the deceptively minimalist husband-and-wife team has built a fan base that swears by their well-turned treatments of standards, pop tunes, and original numbers.

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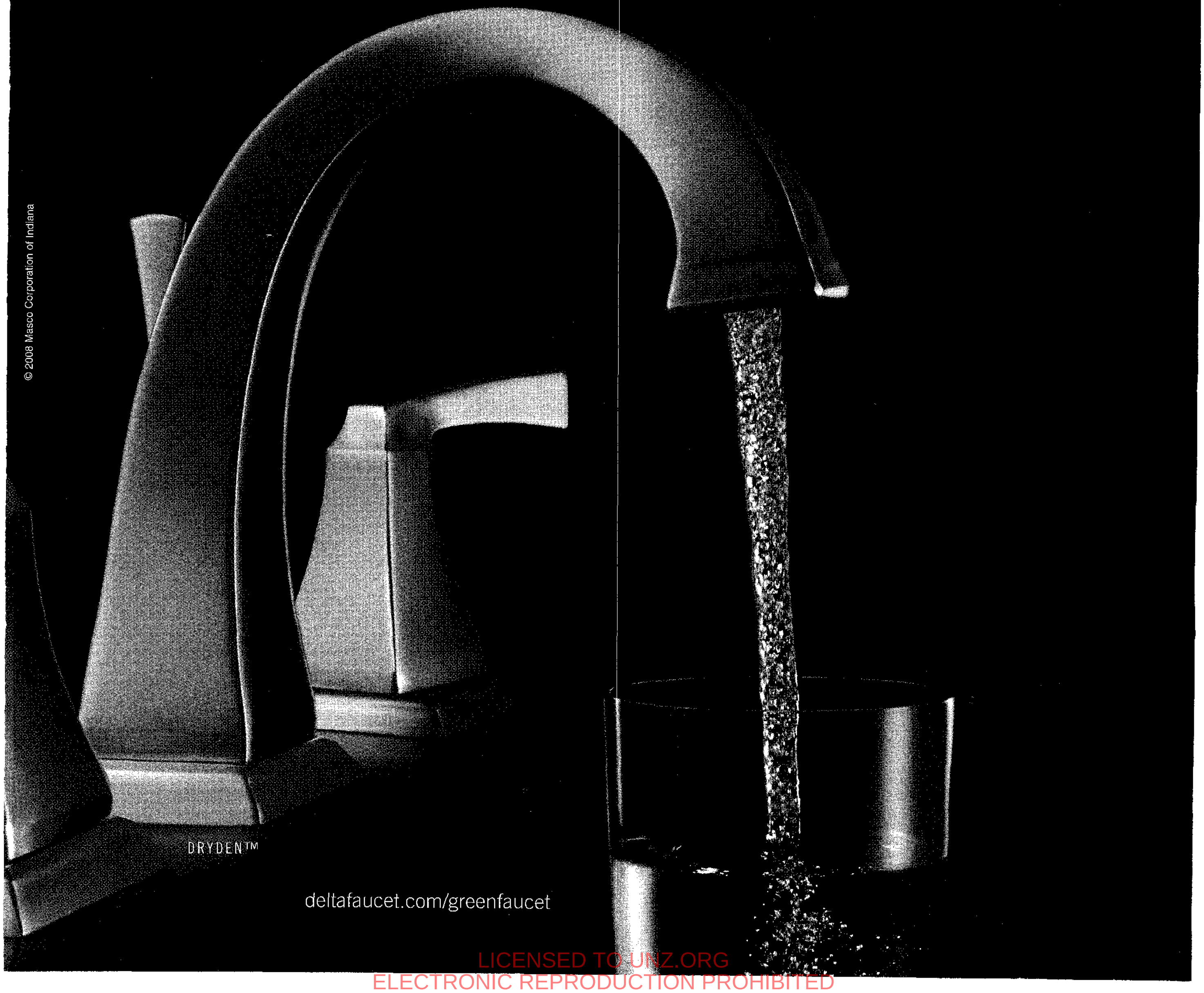

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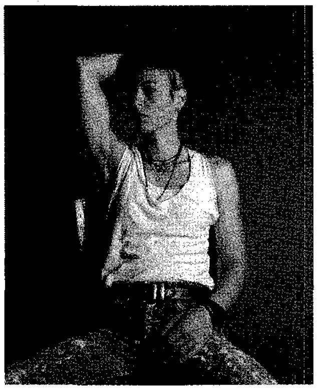
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
SAME DIFFERENCE

Catherine Opie, the American photographer whose mid-career retrospective sprawls through four annex galleries at the Guggenheim, refuses to be pigeonholed. Since the early nineties, her subjects have included members of the gay and transgender communities in Los Angeles and San Francisco, surfers in Malibu, ice houses in Minnesota, radically transgressive performance art, streetscapes in Chicago and lower Manhattan, L.A. mini-malls and freeways, and the domestic lives of lesbians, including her own family and neighborhood, in South Central L.A. She's worked in color and black-and-white, in platinum prints and Polaroid, and in scales that range from the intimate to the monumental. Visitors to the exhibition could easily mistake it for a group show, but that's Opie's strong point and her main appeal. Her interest in issues of identity and community provide useful, if tenuous, links between series of starkly different topics and styles. But what really unites them is a restless sensibility and a genuine engagement with the real wide world.

—*Vince Aletti*



"DIANE DIMASSA," 1994, © CATHERINE OPIE

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through Nov. 1: The guitarist and singer **John Pizzarelli** and his wife, **Jessica Molaskey.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Oct. 28-Nov. 2: The clarinettist and saxophonist **Victor Goines** is joined in his quintet by another Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra mainstay, the trombonist **Wycliffe Gordon.**

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Oct. 28-Nov. 1: The country crossover artist **Crystal Gayle** shares the stage with the Broadway performer **Laura Bell Bundy** (formerly of "Legally Blonde: The Musical") for a program that tips its hat to Kentucky, their home state.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Oct. 29-Nov. 2: Led by the drummer **Jason Marsalis,** the **Lionel Hampton Tribute Band** honors the pioneering vibraphonist, with support from the singer **Diane Schuur** (Oct. 31-Nov. 2); **Clark Terry, Curtis Fuller, Red Holloway,** and **Bucky Pizzarelli** (Oct. 29-30 and Nov. 2); and the master *conguero* **Candido** (Nov. 1-2). Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ GALLERY
290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (212-242-1063)—Oct. 31: The gifted pianist **Kevin Hays** has a special musical rapport with the drummer **Bill Stewart.** The bassist **Vicente Archer** completes Hays's trio.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Oct. 31-Nov. 2: The "Vienna Meets New York" mini-festival brings together established American and Austrian jazz musicians. Oct. 31: The **Outreach Festival Ensemble,** featuring the trumpeter **Franz Hackl,** the pianist **Michael Wolff,** and the tabla player **Badal Roy,** offers a new take on Tyrolean folk music. Nov. 1: The saxophonist **Steve Wilson** leads a tribute to the pre-Weather Report work of the Viennese-born Joe Zawinul. Nov. 2: **Carla Cook** sings Dinah Washington.

SMALLS
183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—Oct. 30: The pianist **Ehud Asherie** performs duets with the trumpeter **Randy Sandke.** The second set belongs to the accomplished guitarist **Howard Alden.** The evening concludes with the pianist **Sacha Perry's** trio.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Oct. 28-Nov. 2: The **Jenny Scheinman** group. The versatile violinist and singer Scheinman layers her sophisticated playing and composing with rural warmth. The pianist **Jason Moran,** whose work enlivens her new album, "Crossing the Field," joins her here. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"The Philippe de Montebello Years: Curators Celebrate Three Decades of Acquisitions."** Through Feb. 1. ♦ **"Giorgio Morandi, 1890-1964."** Through Dec. 14. ♦ **"Landscapes Clear and Radiant: The Art of Wang Hui (1632-1717)."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Royal Porcelain from the Twinight Collection: 1800-1850."** Through April 19. ♦ **"Rhythms of Modern Life: British Prints, 1914-1939."** Through Dec. 7. ♦ **"New York, N. Why?: Photographs by Rudy Burckhardt, 1937-1940."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design Without End."** Through March 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Joan Miró: Painting and Anti-Painting, 1927-1937."** Opens Nov. 2. ♦ **"Van Gogh and the Colors of the Night."** Through Jan. 5. **"Projects 88: Lucy McKenzie."** Through Dec. 1. ♦ **"Kirchner and the Berlin Street."** Through Nov. 10. ♦ **"New Photography 2008: Josephine Meckseper and Mikhael Subotzky."** Through Jan. 5. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Theanyspacewhatever."** New works by ten contemporary artists—including Maurizio Cattelan, Liam Gillick, and Pierre Huyghe—whose work crosses over into architecture, design, cinema, theatre, and, in the case of Philippe Parreno, acoustic museum guides. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Catherine Opie: American Photographer."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Alexander Calder: The Paris Years, 1926-1933."** Through Feb. 15. ♦ **"Corin Hewitt: Seed Stage."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Signs of the Times."** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Gilbert & George."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Jesper Just: Romantic Delusions."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection."** Opens Oct. 31. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Horse."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"The Seduction of Light: Ammi Phillips/Mark Rothko, Compositions in Pink, Green, and Red."** Through March 29. ♦ **"Martin Ramirez: The Last Works."** For those who missed the museum's tour-de-force retrospective of the Mexican outsider's work, last year, think of this epilogue as a makeup session. Ramirez created pellucid, mesmerizing collages, drawings, and paintings with materials supplied to him in the California state hospitals where he spent much of his adult life. The works here, made during his last fifteen years, depict plants, men on horseback, and abstract, fish-scale patterns. Collectively, they possess an almost mystical power, matched by the mystery of how in the world Ramirez arrived at his dazzling personal style while in virtual isolation. Through March 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and until 7:30 on Fridays.)

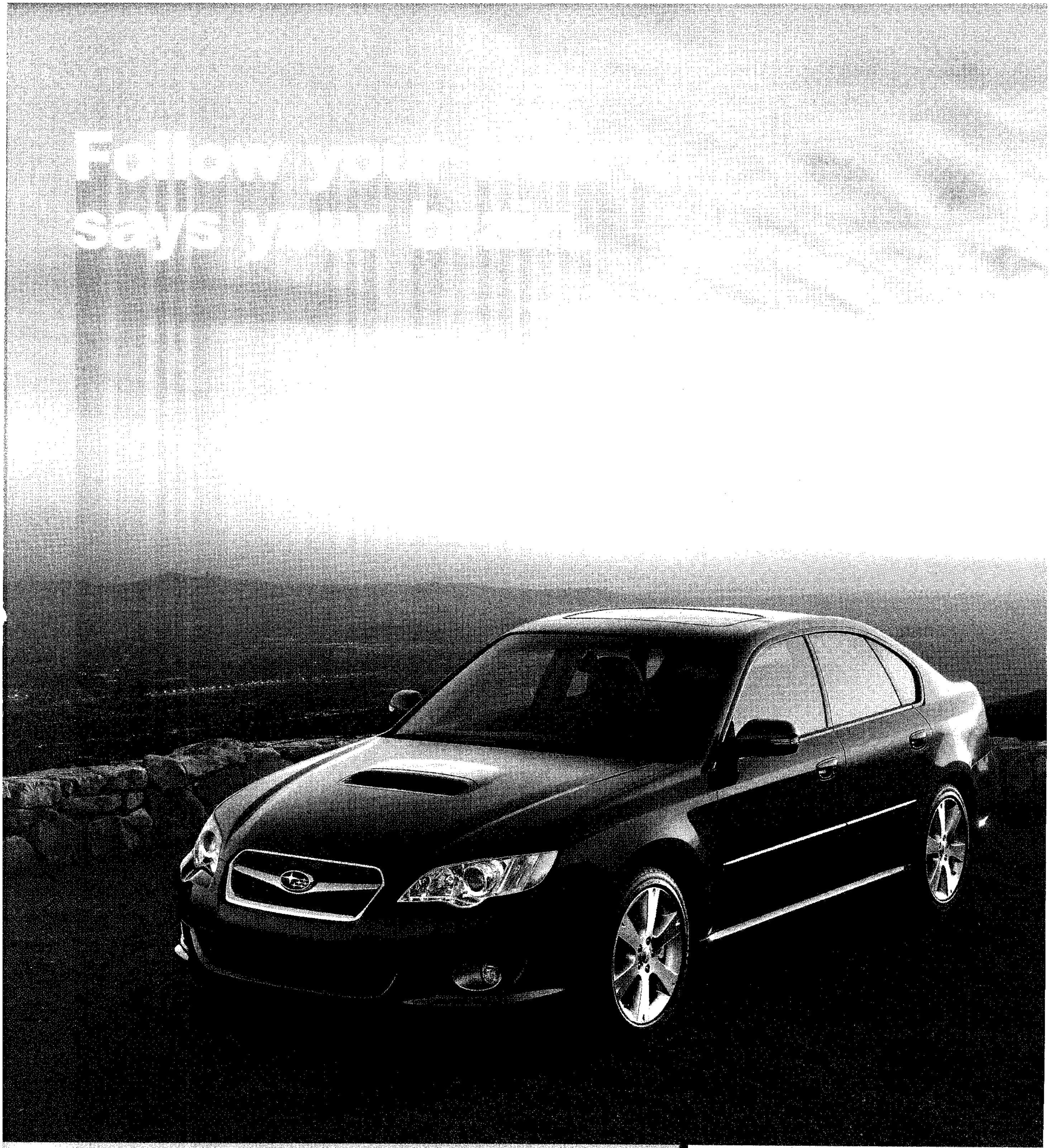
ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Art and China's Revolution."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Writing the Word of God: Calligraphy and the Qur'an."** Through Feb. 8. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS
1040 Grand Concourse (718-681-6000)—**"Street Art, Street Life: From the 1950s to Now."** Through Jan. 25. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Andrea Riccio: Renaissance Master of Bronze."** Through Jan. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

THE GRADUATE CENTER
365 Fifth Ave., at 34th St. (212-817-7138)—**"People 'Weekly.' "** The City University of New York has renovated its midtown gallery and hired the whip-smart art historian and curator Linda Norden (formerly of Harvard's Fogg Art Museum) to run it. Her ambitious inaugural effort is a sequence of six artists' projects and one group show. In the days leading up to (and immediately following) the election, the space becomes Linda Pollack's "Habeas Lounge," which will host lectures on constitutional law (Oct. 29 and Nov. 1), a night of karaoke performed with political speeches in lieu of songs (Oct. 29), and a Halloween party to which guests are encouraged to come dressed as a character from their favorite banned book (Oct. 31). On Nov. 4, visitors are invited to drop by and watch the returns. Through Nov. 6. (Open daily, noon to 11.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Susan Meiselas: In History."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"America**



Whether rationally or emotionally, the Legacy just makes sense. Symmetrical All-Wheel Drive gives you a firm grip on the road. A 243-horsepower engine means plenty of go. With available stability control, the Legacy is even a 2008 IIHS Top Safety Pick.* Go on, follow your heart and your head. **Love. It's what makes a Subaru, a Subaru.**

SUBARU.

and the Tintype." Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Cornell Capa: Concerned Photographer."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Living with the Dead: W. Eugene Smith and World War II."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Drawing Babar: Early Drafts and Watercolors."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Liszt in Paris: Enduring Encounters."** Through Nov. 16. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF ARTS & DESIGN
2 Columbus Circle (212-299-7777)—**"Second Lives: Remixing the Ordinary."** Through Feb. 15. ♦ **"Elegant Armor: The Art of Jewelry."** Through May 31. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"Paris/New York: Design Fashion Culture 1925-1940."** Through Feb. 22. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"George Tooker: A Retrospective"** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"The Unknown Blakelock."** Through Jan. 4. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Alfred Kubin: Drawings, 1897-1909."** Through Jan. 26. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"Mary Heilmann: To Be Someone."** Through Jan. 26. ♦ **"Live Forever: Elizabeth Peyton."** Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Museum as Hub: Six Degrees."** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"Drawn by New York: Six Centuries of Watercolors and Drawings."** Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Grant and Lee in War and Peace."** Through March 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Neohoodoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith."** Through Jan. 26. ♦ **"Leandro Erlich: Swimming Pool."** Through April 13. ♦ **"Yael Bartana."** Through Jan. 19. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

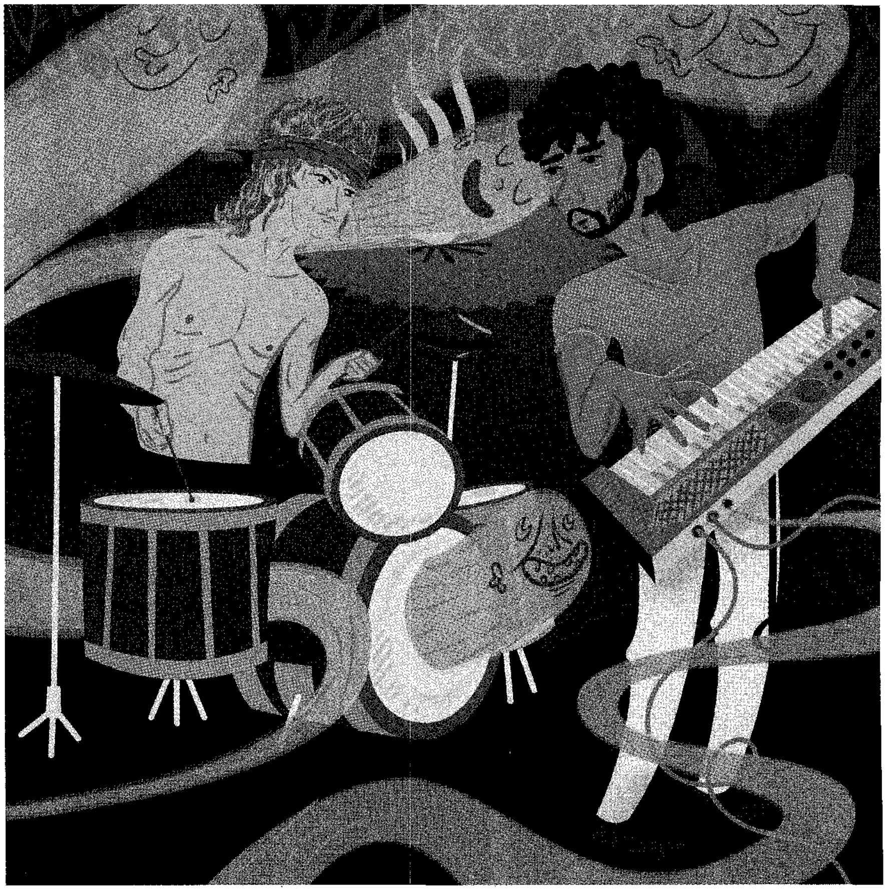
GALLERIES—UPTOWN

JOSEF BREITENBACH
Breitenbach (1896-1984) was an avant-garde photographer who had a Surrealist's eye for visual pastiche but also a decidedly classical bent. (Think of him as photography's de Chirico.) The work that sealed his cult reputation was made in the thirties and forties, and these vintage prints from that period are superb. His subjects may be fairly routine, but his treatment of the nude, the portrait bust, and the formal landscape often involves solarization, montage, and the startlingly unnaturalistic use of color. Slipping a dusty-rose urn, an incandescent-peach female nude, and a rust-colored diagram of the human nervous system into black-and-white pictures, Breitenbach gives realism a thrilling jolt. Through Nov. 22. (Gitterman, 170 E. 75th St. 212-734-0868.)

GRACIELA ITURBIDE
The Mexican photographer, who won this year's Hasselblad Award, is conscious of her heritage of romance, ritual, and extravagant imagination. The thirty black-and-white prints collected here were made between 1974 and the present, and include a number of her most famous images, of peasant women (and one coquettish, cross-dressing man) in iconic and transformative moments. But it's the lesser-known pictures that really stand out, notably a pair of surreal self-portraits, in which Iturbide holds birds over her eyes, and still-lifes of Frida Kahlo's recently rediscovered prosthetic leg and back brace—relics that the artist treats with the reverent reserve of a true believer. Through Nov. 1. (Throckmorton, 145 E. 57th St. 212-223-1059.)

Short List

LOTHAR BAUMGARTEN: Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Nov. 20. **ALEX KATZ:** Baumgold, 74 E. 79th St. 212-861-7338. Through Nov. 26. **KEN PRICE:** Parrasch, 20 W. 57th St. 212-246-5360. Through Nov. 15. **LORNA SIMPSON:** Salon 94, at 12 E. 94th St. 646-672-9212. Through Dec. 6. **"MOLDED, FOLDED, AND FOUND":** Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-445-0444. Through Dec. 23. **"UNTITLED (VICARIOUS)":** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Nov. 1.



The fun-loving duo MGMT, at the Music Hall of Williamsburg and Webster Hall.

PUNY

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER
The octogenarian artist, who also designed the gallery's bright-yellow façade, claims to have put drawing on the back burner in the nineteen-sixties to focus on sculpture. But, as the works on paper here prove, he never lost his passion for working in two dimensions. Some of the drawings use charcoal and pencil to solve sculptural problems of space, form, and light; others experiment with techniques of rubbing and cutting. Even the objects in the show—including an exclamation point made of rubberized horsehair and a black enamel-on-wood dot, a period, installed high on a wall—suggest drawings in space. Through Dec. 6. (Nolan, 527 W. 29th St. 212-925-6190.)

OLAF BREUNING
Breuning plays with the idea of the artist as court jester—zany, infantile, occasionally critical, but essentially harmless. Photographs of his friends, some outfitted in absurd, gross-out prosthetics, are installed alongside images of impoverished Ghanaian boys holding out twenty-dollar bills and of a digitized landscape, in which a flock of birds spells out the question "Why can you not be nice with nature?" A generous selection of drawings and ceramic bases topped with silly arrangements of found objects completes the show. Breuning's self-deprecating sensibility is on full display—down to the crossed-out signature on the wall inside the gallery's entrance—but his talents are better harnessed in the manic, hallucinatory films he has shown in the past. Through Nov. 8. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100.)

ALEJANDRA LAVIADA
Laviada made a terrific first impression at the New York Photo Festival this past spring, and it's no disappointment to see many of the same pieces in her first New York solo show. Working in old factories and offices in Mexico City, Laviada creates and photographs temporary assemblages on the buildings' dusty concrete floors. The empty gray spaces, lit by the sun, provide the elegantly neutral backdrop for a pyramid of paint cans, a leaning tower of file folders, a rainbow arc of paint rollers, and two piles of circular objects as antic and appealing as anything Rauschenberg ever threw together. Through Nov. 22. (Danziger, 521 W. 26th St. 212-629-6778.)

BEATRIZ MILHAZES
These irresistible, carnival-colored paintings are a mashup of Pop floral motifs and Neo-Concretist geometry. (Milhazes is Brazilian; a writer once summed up her work as "reflecting the dirty prettiness of Rio.") For all their painterly brio, however, the compositions are not, strictly speaking, paintings. Instead, they are giant collages, made by applying acrylic paint to plastic, then letting the decal dry against canvas. Adding to the unabashedly decorative medium-blurring are "drawings" as big as the paintings—collages on paper made of designer shopping bags, metallic foil, and Mentos wrappers. Through Nov. 15. (Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500.)

Short List

NICOLE CHERUBINI: D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460. Through Nov. 1. **STAN DOUGLAS:** Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Opens Oct.

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st spacious the world has ev

30. **JUDITH EISLER:** Cohan and Leslie, 138 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-206-8710. Through Nov. 15. **GEORGE HERMS:** Inglett, 522 W. 24th St. 212-647-9111. Through Nov. 15. **SEAN LANDERS:** Petzel, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467. Through Nov. 8. **KEITH MAYERSON:** Eller, 615 W. 27th St. 212-206-6411. Through Nov. 15. **MATTHEW MONAHAN:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through Nov. 15. **ERNESTO NETO:** Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144. Through Nov. 15. **LARI PITTMAN:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Nov. 29. **LISA SANDITZ:** CRG, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-229-2766. Through Nov. 29. **"AFTER OCTOBER":** Dee, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-924-7545. Through Nov. 22.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

NICOLE CHERUBINI
Large ceramic vessels—constructed from coils of clay, terra-cotta, and porcelain, hunks of marble and alabaster, plywood, and more—conjure classic Greek amphorae. To these the artist has attached sculptural appendages and 2-D constructions housed in rectilinear frames. Cherubini's deft approach owes as much to Jessica Stockholder as it does to George Ohr, but, rather than raiding the shelves of the Home Depot, she excavates Edith Hamilton and Joseph Campbell country. The results are ornamental, down and dirty, and altogether exhilarating. Three related sculptures are on view in Chelsea, at D'Amelio Terras. Through Nov. 16. (Smith-Stewart, 53 Stanton St. 212-477-2821.)

"PSYCHOTIC REACTION"
A 1966 hit by Count Five lends its name—and a mood of feedback-distorted yearning—to this lively group show. Flamboyant drawings of flowers, sunbursts, and sex (by Ele D'Artagnan) and Ensor-like, cross-species crowds (by Bill Adams) set a tone of cheery perversity. Beverly Semmes's glazed ceramics on found-furniture bases follow suit. Les LeVeque and Philip Travers work a hypnotic angle with kaleidoscopic videos and an assisted-readymade record-player, respectively, while Penelope Umbrico constructs a psychedelic grid of photographs of rising suns found online. Through Oct. 29. (K.S. Art, 73 Leonard St. 212-219-9918.)

Short List

LEON GOLUB: Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 212-226-3232. Through Nov. 15. **JONATHAN HOROWITZ:** Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258. Through Nov. 15. **CLIFFORD OWENS:** On Stellar Rays, 133 Orchard St. 212-598-3012. Opens Nov. 2. **LORNA SIMPSON:** Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400. Through Dec. 6.

DANCE

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE
The company's Antony Tudor celebration culminates in an all-Tudor program on Oct. 31, a rare opportunity to experience the choreographer's many facets, from the fluid lyricism of "Continuo" and the suffocating social drama of "Jardin aux Lilas" to the touchingly childlike bedroom scene from his "Romeo and Juliet" ("Romeo's Farewell"), his saucy "Judgment of Paris," and the emotional intensity of "Pillar of Fire." Also this week, Twyla Tharp's Scottish romp, "Brief Fling," will be performed by the company for the first time since 1991, and last year's revival of Balanchine's virtuoso dazzler "Ballo della Regina" returns. Casts appear on the company's Web site. ♦ Oct. 28 at 7:30: "Ballo della Regina," "Flames of Paris," "Overgrown Path," and "Brief Fling." ♦ Oct. 29 at 7:30: "Company B," "Jardin aux Lilas" (with Julie Kent), and "Brief Fling." ♦ Oct. 30 at 7:30: "Ballo della Regina," Pas de Deux from "Romeo and Juliet" ("Romeo's Farewell"), "Jardin aux Lilas" (with Melissa Thomas), and "Company B." ♦ Oct. 31 at 8 (Tudor Celebration): "Continuo," "Jardin aux Lilas" (Kent), Pas de Deux from "Romeo and Juliet" ("Romeo's Farewell"), "Judgment of Paris," and "Pillar of Fire." ♦ Nov. 1 at 2: "Ballo della Regina," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "Jardin aux Lilas" (Kent), and "Brief Fling." ♦ Nov. 1 at 8: "Baker's Dozen," "Citizen," "Pillar of Fire," and "Brief Fling." ♦ Nov. 2 at 1:30: "Ballo della Regina," "Flames of Paris," "Jardin aux Lilas" (Thomas), and "Company B." ♦ Nov. 2 at 7: "Ballo della Regina," Pas de Deux from "Romeo and Juliet" ("Romeo's Farewell"), "Overgrown Path," and "Brief Fling." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

DANCENOW [NYC]
This annual festival is an ever-evolving portrait of the downtown dance scene. Wide-ranging, all-inclusive, and to a certain extent democratic—each company gets a seven-minute slot to show its work—the programming brings together more than sixty choreographers, from experimentalists just finding their groove (in the "Base Camp" programs) to dance survivors, such as the mature dancers of Paradigm (in the "40Up" evenings). This year's festival features four choreographers in their tenth year of work—Cherylyn Lavagnino, John Heginbotham, Robert Battle, and Monica Bill Barnes. Other participants include Gerald Casel, Ashleigh Leite, and Dušan Týnek. For a full schedule, see www.dancetheaterworkshop.org. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Oct. 27-Nov. 1 at 8.)

EIKO & KOMA
The king and queen of slow return to a favorite topic with "Hunger." In the piece, they are joined by Charian and Peace, a pair of young painters whom the Japanese-born duo discovered during a recent project in Cambodia—guileless amateurs without the absorbing authority of their elders. For Eiko and Koma, whose speed if not intensity always suggests someone conserving calories, the subject is ideal: elemental, with wide metaphorical resonances, an ache that can turn violent and invest near-stillness with urgency. (Joyce, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Oct. 28-29 at 7:30, Oct. 30-Nov. 1 at 8, and Nov. 2 at 2.)

LUCIANA ACHUGAR
The Uruguayan-born experimental choreographer presents "The Sublime Is Us," in which five performers literally feel their way around the relationship between dancer and spectator. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Oct. 28-30 at 7:30 and Oct. 31-Nov. 1 at 7:30 and 9:30.)

LAURA PETERSON CHOREOGRAPHY
Dixon Place, which has long presented experimental and lesser-known artists in a humble, ramshackle setting, opens a new theatre that's small but snazzy. Inaugurating the space, Peterson, a young choreographer with a strong visual sense, takes advantage of the fact that there is a mezzanine by seating the audience there and having them look down on the white stage through hanging colored ribbons. In "Forever," the dancers, in monochromatic outfits, execute subtly shifting patterns that have a kind of geometric clarity—an abstraction of a kaleidoscope. Rob Erickson, also known as Lumberob, adds his vocal loops, which resemble beatboxing by way of Steve Reich. (161 Chrystie St. 212-219-0736. Oct. 29-30 at 8, Oct. 31 at 7, and Nov. 1-2 at 8. Through Nov. 8.)

ARENA DANCES
The company, based in Minneapolis, makes its New York début with "Ugly," by its artistic director, Matthew Janczewski. In the course of an hour, the dancers strip out of Baroque costumes and into disco wear and then into bras and briefs, and nestle on Astroturf. Through the group gropes and the undistinguished dancing, some kind of narrative about decadence and a return to nature is discernible, but it's not particularly interesting. Morton Subotnik plays his electronic score live onstage. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. Oct. 30-Nov. 1 at 8 and Nov. 2 at 3.)

SARA JULI
Juli takes on the subject of mortality, not as a spiritual question or an abstract idea but, in her usual m.o., as a direct reality. Her solo show "Death" explores the discomfort and terror elicited by this subject, through a combination of movement, spo-

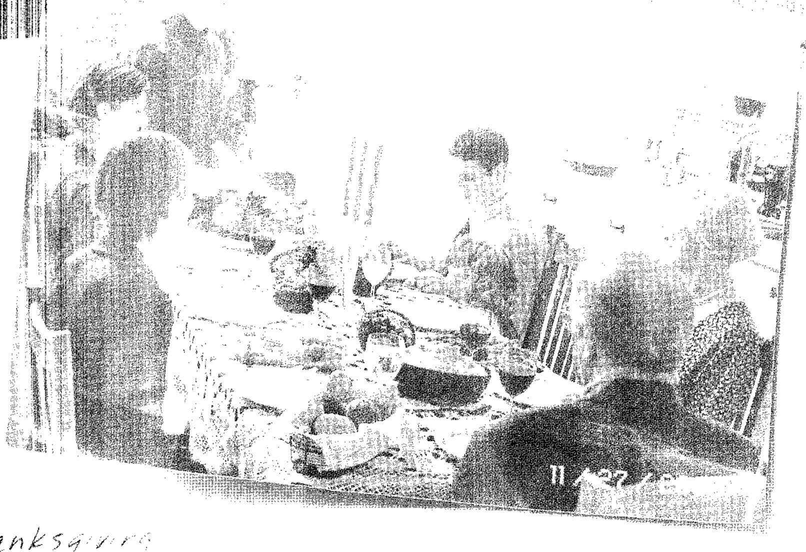
TABLES FOR TWO
MATSUGEN

241 Church St., at Leonard St. (212-925-0202)—The front of the house at Matsugen belongs to Jean-Georges Vongerichten, the Asian-inspired French chef whose restaurants include Spice Market, Perry Street, and the extraordinary Jean-Georges. Matsugen used to be 66, Vongerichten's tribute to the Chinese kitchen. But the Chinese tiger did not roar on Church Street. Gone are the red calligraphed pennants hanging from the ceiling, although a fish tank (and a single moray eel) remains, along with—in what is perhaps a final nod to the Chairman—a long, often lonely communal bar. The room is chic, austere, and ultimately a bore; the staff is attentive, knowledgeable, and almost uncomfortably obeisant. The furniture suggests an office (a really nice one), and the body jitteriness of the waiters (they are big on speed-clearing) may make one less consumed by the food than by the sense that the bankers and traders a few blocks down might not be the only ones whose job security is uncertain.

The back of the house belongs to Masa, Taka, and Yoshi Matsushita, three brothers from Tokyo who own soba restaurants in Hawaii and Japan. Soba is a kind of thin noodle made of buckwheat flour, served hot or cold. In Japan, it's eaten on New Year's Eve (*toshikoshi soba*, or "year-crossing noodles"), and given to new neighbors as a gesture of good will (*hikkoshi soba*, "moving-in noodles"). Since Matsugen opened, in June, it has provoked wildly varying assessments. Vongerichten has chalked the most negative one up to the ignorance of a soba rube, writing on his blog, in response to a pan by Adam Platt, in *New York*, "It seems he may have misunderstood the concept behind Matsugen—it's commitment to pure, authentic Japanese cooking." But Matsugen can be a letdown for those who appreciate, and even crave, the stark flavors of Japanese cuisine. The restaurant's signature appetizer, a "bakudan" of uni, salmon, and baby scallops, topped with nori and a poached quail egg, is gorgeously arrayed in an earthenware bowl, but the Tokyo clam chowder with soy milk—Vongerichten says it's one of his favorite dishes—is a dull muddle of wheat gluten and chewy clams. The *omakase* menu, an opportunity for exuberance, was mirthless: satisfying, but safe, miso-glazed salmon; a salad of field greens and desiccated pork loin; wan mushrooms coated in a truly awful gritty batter. Some of Matsugen's dishes, like the good but not great duck soba, the extra broth of which a diner is encouraged to drink, may be enriched by an understanding of their form. But, like haikus, some soba houses are better than others, and it doesn't take a scholar to figure out that this one is missing some beats. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $12-$135.)

—*Lauren Collins*

NATALIE MATUTSCHOVSKY



Thanksgiving
Weekend - 2035

There are some meals you just never forget.
That turkey was the driest I'd ever eaten.
Serves us right for not listening to Mom.
Before we ate that day, I remember looking at
the expressions on our kids' faces. The moment
really struck me. That's when I realized how
important it was to take care of my family.
Not just then, but throughout our lives. I'm glad
Eddie and I received some solid financial advice
to help ensure good times like these would always last.
Nowadays, I may be retired from making Thanksgiving
dinner, and I'm OK with that. Mainly because
I have a few recipes of my own to pass on.

I remember this crossword & [illegible]

The Crossword Challenge Series

Up for a new challenge? Here's one to get your futureself thinking—about looking ahead.

Lincoln Financial Group presents the fifth in a series of six individually themed crosswords that you can solve and mail in or enter online at www.futuresweeps.com. Complete either of the two remaining crosswords correctly, and be entered to win a Nikon Coolpix S550 10.0 megapixel digital camera with 5x optical zoom and 2.5" LCD display (value: $229.95). One winner will be selected for each of the crossword challenges.

Correctly complete any of the Lincoln Financial crosswords this year, and you'll qualify to win the Grand Prize—an Undiscovered Italy™ premium villa vacation. (Complete more than one in the series correctly, and increase your chances of winning! One entry per challenge per household, please.) Grand Prize includes round-trip airfare for two, car rental, and a $2,000 credit toward an unforgettable luxury stay at Parker Villas in regions such as Tuscany, Umbria, Piedmont, Liguria, or Puglia (total value: $4,500).

To enter, mail in your solution by **midnight, November 24th,** to:
The Lincoln Financial Group Crossword Challenge, c/o The New Yorker Promotion Department,
attn: "Futureself," 4 Times Square, 21st floor, New York, NY 10036, or enter online at www.futuresweeps.com.

Visit Web site for complete contest rules, and again after December 1st for this puzzle's solution.

1	2	3	■	4	5	6	7	■	8	9	10	11
12			■	13				■	14			
15			■	16				■	17			
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44				■	45		46		■	47		48
49				■	50				■	51		
52				■	53				■	54		

ACROSS

1. Mozart's opera buffa, "L'__ del Cairo"
4. Blue __ (low-risk stock)
8. Attendees of #2-Down
12. Year-end for some corps.
13. First-rate
14. "_ _" ("you have," text-message style)
15. "Investing" starts with it, _ _
16. __ versa
17. The TT of TTFN
18. Arrived
20. Immediate, fixed, or variable, as a retirement investment
22. Investment goals
24. It flows under the Ponte Vecchio
25. Gait at the gates
26. Buying _ _ _ in the country (dream purchase, perhaps)
28. Basic guitar sounds
30. Empty ___ = Happy camper?
34. Very, to Verdi
36. Yield, such as a profit
37. Hillary met Bill here
39. Preëminent
41. Tournament lid: 2 wds.
43. Car__ (wine containers, add on)
44. Doozie
45. Cartoonist's drawing tips?
47. Assets or worth
49. Driver's license is proof of it, for short
50. Make all your dreams come __!
51. Three, in Tuscany
52. Stock's pal
53. Order to a broker
54. 1040 info.

DOWN

1. Go _ _ _ trip around the world. (Embark! Explore! Enjoy!)
2. Entertainment expense, ____ tickets
3. ____-style glasses (fly-school gear)
4. Speleologist
5. __ polloi
6. One way to pay: 2 wds.
7. Hammer's end
8. The you that's yet to come
9. Dance instructor's command
10. "_ _ _ worry." (All will be fine.)
11. Hotel __ (vacation expense)
19. Investment vehicle: 2 wds.
21. First or Last (application detail)
22. Abbr. of #22-Across
23. __ River (in northern British Columbia)
27. Taking care of business: 2 wds.
29. 1/1000 of a second, for short
31. Abilities (Parlay them into sources of income.)
32. Doodle deleters
33. Time off, briefly
35. Aim to fulfill a lifelong passion
37. Query for retirees: "What will _ _ now?"
38. Burns' comic partner
40. Art-class stand
41. Smooth-talking
42. Industrious insects
46. Country south of Rom.
48. A bill in the till

THE LINCOLN FINANCIAL GROUP CROSSWORD CHALLENGE RULES AND REGULATIONS

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY.

1. This challenge starts October 27, 2008, 12:01 A.M. ET, and ends 12:00 A.M. ET, November 24, 2008. Each individual crossword contest will last a month from issue newsstand date.
2. Contestants may enter the contest by correctly completing and submitting the Lincoln Financial Group crossword via mail, or by submitting a photocopy thereof found in the November 3, 2008, issue of *The New Yorker*. Contestants must include name, address, telephone, and e-mail address in the envelope addressed to The New Yorker Promotion Department, attn: "Futureself," 4 Times Square, 21st floor, New York, NY 10036. Contestants may also enter online at www.futuresweeps.com.
3. Prize description as noted above or visit www.futuresweeps.com for more information.
4. One camera will be given away for each of the series' two remaining crossword challenges.
5. This sweepstakes (the "Promotion") is only open to legal residents of the 50 United States and the District of Columbia who are at least 18 years old as of the date of entry, except officers, directors, members, and employees of the Sponsor, the judging organization (if applicable), or any other party associated with the development or administration of this Promotion, and their immediate family (i.e., parents, children, siblings, spouse), and persons residing in the same household as such individuals. Lincoln Financial Group affiliates and their respective employees/representatives are not eligible to win prizes from this sweepstakes. This Promotion is void outside the 50 United States and the District of Columbia, and where prohibited.
6. One entry per challenge per household for each of the Lincoln Financial Group Crossword challenges.
7. For complete contest rules, visit www.futuresweeps.com, and again after December 1st for puzzle solution.

ken text, singing, and awkward interactions with her public. (P.S. 122, First Ave. at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Oct. 31-Nov. 2 at 8:30.)

PRIYADARSINI GOVIND
Bharata natyam, one of the principal classical Indian dance forms, was developed as a temple dance performed by *devadasis* in southern India. In it, storytelling, devotion, and abstract dance find full expression—both the clarity of the visualized poetry and the virtuosity of the movement can be utterly thrilling. Govind, from Chennai (Madras), is a thirty-year veteran of the form, known for her precision, her rhythmic footwork, and her expressive form of mime. She performs at N.Y.U.'s Skirball Center with her ensemble of musicians and vocalists. (566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-545-7536. Nov. 1 at 8.)

"WORKS & PROCESS"
The series devotes an evening to the music of the American modernist Charles Wuorinen, celebrating his seventieth birthday, hosted by one of Wuorinen's greatest champions, James Levine. Wuorinen himself will play "Praegustatum for James Levine," a piano piece dedicated to the Maestro; the novelty of the evening will be a dance set to "The Mission of Virgil" (part of Wuorinen's "Dante Trilogy"), by the inventive modern-dance choreographer Sean Curran. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Nov. 2-3 at 7:30.)

GARTH FAGAN DANCE
For his annual visit to the Joyce, the man from Rochester shares the contents of his voice mail. The sound score for "Phone Tag, Thanks & Things" intersperses recorded messages he's received over the years with solo piano music by Bongani Ndodana, Florence Price, and Wallace Cheatham, to which Fagan applies his personal blend of Caribbean and classical. That work, a première, anchors two different programs that mostly sample from recent repertory, reaching back only for the rhythmic complexity of "Time After Before Place," from 1988, and for the best primer in Fagan style, "Prelude: Discipline Is Freedom," from 1983. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Nov. 4 at 7:30. Through Nov. 9.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Though excitingly controversial at its première, in 2006—the cinematic sweep, the puppet boy—Anthony Minghella's production of **"Madama Butterfly"** is set to become an honorable survivor. Patricia Racette, a superb interpreter of the title role, leads an impressive cast that also features Maria Zifchak, Roberto Aronica, and Dwayne Croft; Patrick Summers conducts. (Oct. 29 and Nov. 4 at 8 and Nov. 1 at 1.) ♦ The Met presents the New York première of John Adams's **"Doctor Atomic,"** an opera that gives a lyrical tone and a mythic dimension to the invention of the atomic bomb, at Los Alamos, at the end of the Second World War. Two superb singers, Gerald Finley and Eric Owens, reprise their San Francisco roles of J. Robert Oppenheimer and his nemesis, General Leslie Groves; Sasha Cooke sings the role of Kitty Oppenheimer; Alan Gilbert conducts. (Oct. 30 at 8 and Nov. 1 at 8:30.) ♦ The beloved Franco Zeffirelli production of **"La Traviata"** returns to the house with a cast led by Anja Harteros, Massimo Giordano, and Željko Lučić; Paolo Carignani. (Oct. 31 and Nov. 3 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA: "LOOKING FORWARD"
The new Gerard Mortier regime, paving the way for next season's scheduled foray into twentieth-century opera, continues its tour of the five boroughs. The program, featuring the City Opera Chorus and Orchestra, conducted by George Manahan, offers music by Britten (excerpts from "Les Illuminations," with the tenor Brian Anderson), Debussy, Messiaen, Steve Reich ("Clapping Music"), Lukas Foss, and Stravinsky ("Pulcinella"). (Whitman Theatre, Brooklyn College, 2900 Campus Rd. www.brooklyncenter.com. Nov. 2 at 4.)

CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY OPERA
The invaluable little company, a clearinghouse for all sorts of new operas, presents a reading of Ben Yarmolinsky's **"Clarence and Anita,"** a jocular "docu-opera" based on Clarence Thomas's Supreme Court confirmation hearings, featuring characters based on Anita Hill and Senator Joseph Biden (in addition to a Whiffenpoof-type chorus of Ivy League lawyers). (The Cell, 338 W. 23rd St. 800-838-3006. Oct. 29 at 8.)

AMATO OPERA: "LA TRAVIATA"
Anthony Amato's production of Verdi's melodrama won't have the Met's sumptuousness (or its high-class voices), but it could be almost as endearing; the theatre's new English supertitles should help. (319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. Nov. 1 at 7:30 and Nov. 2 at 2:30. Through Nov. 16.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Carnegie Hall's (and Lincoln Center's) Bernstein Festival intersects with the ongoing celebration of Elliott Carter's centenary in an exceptionally interesting program at the Philharmonic, conducted by David Robertson: Carter's William Carlos Williams song cycle "Of Rewaking" and Bernstein's "Jeremiah" Symphony (both with the mezzo-soprano Michelle DeYoung), along with the New York première of Christopher Rouse's "Rapture" and Copland's beloved "Appalachian Spring." Each concert will begin with a brief presentation about the Carter work, by the composer Steven Stucky. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Oct. 30 at 7:30 and Oct. 31-Nov. 1 at 8.)

NEW YORK VIRTUOSO SINGERS
Harold Rosenbaum's superb professional choir, no stranger to modern music, makes its own toast to Elliott Carter by performing his complete music for a-cappella choir (including the New York première of "Mad Regales"). (St. Ignatius of Antioch Church, West End Ave. at 87th St. Nov. 2 at 3. Tickets at the door.)

"MUSIC BEFORE 1800" SERIES: DIABOLUS IN MUSICA
The history of civilization has its benchmarks. One was Guillaume de Machaut's "Messe de Notre Dame"—the first complete setting of the Mass—which was written in the mid-fourteenth century. Antoine Guerber's male chorus uses the work as the cornerstone of its American-début program, at Corpus Christi Church. (529 W. 121st St. 212-666-9266. Nov. 2 at 4.)

RECITALS

MUSIC AT THE 92ND STREET Y
Oct. 28-29 at 8: During the next month, the Y offers a travelogue through Russia's "Silver Age," the early-twentieth-century ferment that brought the country's musical life to its apex. It begins with a program offered by the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio which features three favorite piano trios by Rachmaninoff, Arensky (No. 1 in D Minor), and Tchaikovsky. ♦ Nov. 1 at 8: The Y's vibrant annual series "Art of the Guitar" is kicked off by the magnetic young American player Jason Vieaux, performing a mixture of solo works by Bach, Albéniz, and Leo Brouwer (along with several of Vieaux's arrangements of Pat Metheny songs). (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

MUSIC AT (LE) POISSON ROUGE
The eclecticism of the new-music club will be stretched to the limit in one impressive evening. Oct. 29 at 7: The Jack Quartet, an up-and-coming group of adept composer-performers who are already veterans of the Venice Biennale, offers the complete string quartets of the modernist legend Iannis Xenakis, in all their dazzling and rugged glory. ♦ Oct. 29 at 9:30: Corey Dargel's ingenious nouveau art songs revel in the teasing triviality of pop but have enough classical discipline to keep them from going too far. His latest project is "Other People's Love Songs," performed by the NOW Ensemble. (158 Bleecker St. www.lepoissonrouge.com.)

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A 1939 photograph by Rudy Burckhardt, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

born within hours of each other, on February 12, 1809. The classical-hip-hop violinist and composer Daniel Bernard Roumain (DBR, to his fans) has used texts by both men (as well as by the playwright Daniel Beaty) to craft a music-theatre work that also involves the vocalist Emeline Michel and the SymphoNYC orchestra, conducted by Paul Haas. (BAM Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Oct. 29 and Oct. 31-Nov. 1 at 7:30.)

EDGAR MEYER AND CHRIS THILE
Two brilliant performers who have used their instruments—double-bass and mandolin, respectively—to wander all over the stylistic map make a voyage into bluegrass (with a classical twist) in an evening of original music at Carnegie Hall. (212-247-7800. Oct. 29 at 8.)

MAYA BEISER: "PROVENANCE"
Beiser, the doyenne of avant-garde cello, reaches backward and forward at once in a multimedia concert production (directed by Robert Woodruff) featuring new works (by such composers as Douglas J. Cuomo, Kayhan Kalhor, and Simon Shaheen) inspired by the cultural glories of Spain's medieval Golden Age. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 30 at 7:30.)

ANDRÁS SCHIFF
Schiff, whose lyrical but mercurial and implacably driven style makes him a surprising Beethoven interpreter, continues his Carnegie Hall survey of the piano recitals with a concert offering five of them (including the "Appassionata" and "Les Adieux" Sonatas). (212-247-7800. Oct. 30 at 8.)

MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN
The magnificent Canadian piano virtuoso performs a concert at the Metropolitan Museum which embraces the range of his artistic interests—the modern (Berg's Piano Sonata), the classical (Chopin's Sonata No. 2 in B-Flat Minor), and the obscure (Alkan's Concerto for Solo Piano). (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Oct. 30 at 8.)

KELLER QUARTET
The superb Hungarian ensemble, renowned for its interpretation of the music of its native genius György Kurtág, performs two of his works, along with string quartets by Mozart (the Adagio and Fugue, K. 546) and Schubert (the grand Quartet No. 15 in G Major). (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 31 at 7:30.)

BARGEMUSIC
The spirit of adventure reigns this weekend at the floating chamber-music series. Oct. 31 at 8: Thanks largely to the conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen, the Los Angeles new-music scene is more exciting than ever. The barge hosts a small group of performers (including the clarinettist Julia Heinen and the pianist Dmitry Rachmanov) who perform a sequence of New York- and world-première works by Frank Campo, William Toutant, Gernot Wolfgang ("New York Moments"), and other talented SoCal denizens. ♦ Nov. 1 at 8: The Neolit Ensemble—a young clarinet-violin-piano trio that plays regularly here—offers trios from the past four decades by such engaging composers as Katherine Hoover, Jennifer Higdon, Paul Schoenfield, and John Harbison. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

DAWN UPSHAW AND STEPHEN PRUTSMAN
Old music (songs by John Dowland), folk music, and new music inspired by folk sources (including Osvaldo Golijov's "Lúa Descolorida" and David Bruce's "Piosenki") fill the program offered by the beloved and intrepid soprano and her accompanist, who will be joined by the fine young musicians of Carnegie Hall's Ensemble ACJW. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Nov. 2 at 7:30.)

"WORKS & PROCESS: WUORINEN AT 70"
Charles Wuorinen, the Guggenheim Museum's de-facto resident composer, is fêted by a stellar group of performers—including the conductor James Levine, members of the Brentano String Quartet, and the Sean Curran Dance Company—in a birthday concert that features "Ashberyana," his powerful song cycle set to poems by John Ashbery, and a choreographed version of "The Mission of Virgil," inspired by Dante's "Inferno." (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Nov. 2-3 at 7:30.)

MOVIES
OPENING

THE FIRST BASKET
A documentary, directed by David Vyorst, about Jewish basketball players in the sport's early years. Narrated by Peter Riegert. Opening Oct. 29. (Village East Cinemas.)

THE HAUNTING OF MOLLY HARTLEY
A horror movie about a private-school girl who is disturbed by troubling visions. Directed by Mickey Liddell. Opening Oct. 31. (In wide release.)

THE MATADOR
A documentary about an aspiring bullfighter, directed by Stephen Higgins and Nina Seavey. Opening Oct. 31. (Angelika Film Center.)

MY NAME IS BRUCE
A horror comedy, directed by and starring Bruce Campbell, about an actor who is mistaken for his famous horror character and has to fight a monster. Opening Oct. 31. (Sunshine Cinema.)

ONE DAY YOU'LL UNDERSTAND
Amos Gitai directed this drama, about a Jewish man in France who uncovers secrets about his family's wartime activities. Starring Hippolyte Girardot, Jeanne Moreau, and Emmanuelle Devos. In French. Opening Oct. 31. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE OTHER END OF THE LINE
A romantic drama about a call-center employee who travels from India to San Francisco to meet a man she's spoken with. Starring Jesse Metcalfe, Shriya Saran, and Anupam Kher. Directed by James Dodson. Opening Oct. 31. (In limited release.)

SPLINTER
Toby Wilkins directed this horror film, about a couple who survive a carjacking and must battle a flesh-eating monster. Opening Oct. 31. (Village East Cinemas.)

ZACK AND MIRI MAKE A PORNO
In this comedy, directed by Kevin Smith, two broke roommates (Seth Rogen and Elizabeth Banks) try to raise money with a homemade sex video. Co-starring Jason Mewes, Craig Robinson, and Traci Lords. Opening Oct. 31. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

APPALOOSA
A well-made, satisfying, traditionalist Western with some odd quirks and turns. Virgil Cole (Ed Harris) and his deputy, Everett Hitch (Viggo Mortensen), are guns for hire in the Old West—longtime partners who communicate mainly with glances, nods, a few gnomic words, and a deepening stillness that suddenly explodes into violence. In 1882, they enter Appaloosa, a New Mexico frontier town, and offer their services to people who are being terrorized by a rapacious landowner and gang leader (Jeremy Irons). The movie offers a fresh character in Allie French (Renée Zellweger), who seems, at first, the usual refined lady from the East. She latches on to Virgil, breaking up the chaste, straightback-mountain love affair of Virgil and Hitch, but she's not quite what either man expects—that is, she's neither a wife nor a whore but a little of both. Harris, who directed, revels in the wide-open spaces and the drab, dusty little towns; the Old West

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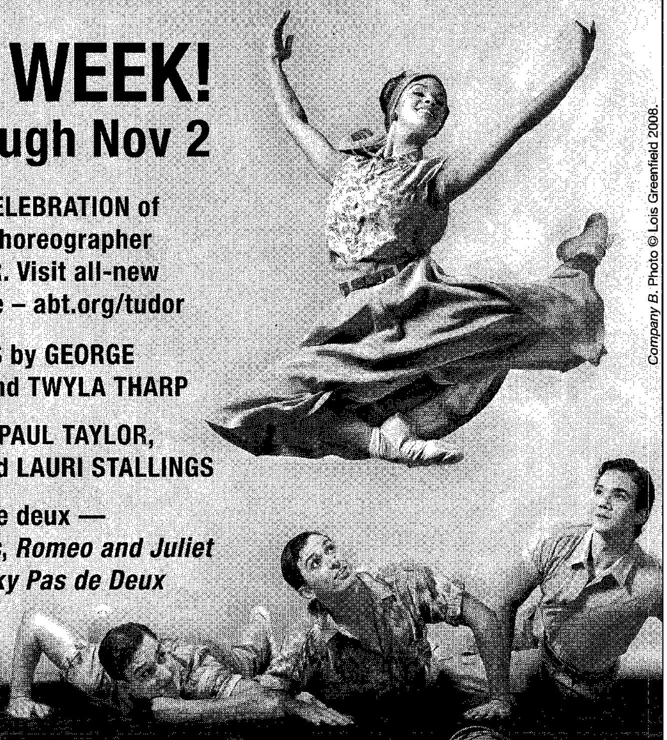

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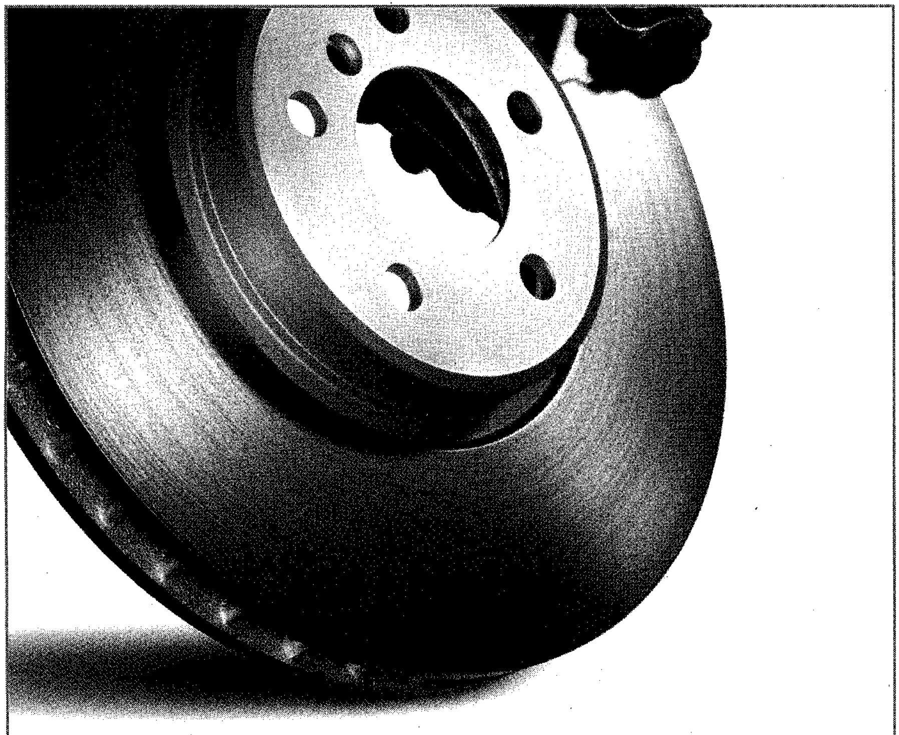


comes off as a scary and melancholy place. Shot outside of Santa Fe by Dean Semler. With Timothy Spall and Ariadna Gil.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 9/29/08.) (In wide release.)

ASHES OF TIME REDUX
The Hong Kong-based director Wong Kar-Wai oversaw the restoration of his imagistic 1994 lone-swordsman spectacle, and the result is splashy, arch, and unengaging. The intricate story, based on a novel by Louis Cha, takes place in a vaguely mythical past and nests plots within plots, all of which lead back to the hermitlike killer Ouyang Feng (Leslie Cheung), who left home to seek glory. In his absence, his fiancée (Maggie Cheung) married his brother, and, having sought refuge in solitude, Ouyang now ekes out a spare living as a hit man. Wong's visuals are calculated to the millimetre to impress, but the speckles of light that pierce a wicker birdcage and the slow-motion blur of bloody sword fights have all the empty allure of a television commercial, and neither character nor drama nor acting nor even a scintilla of spontaneous invention has any place in them. In Mandarin and Cantonese.—*Richard Brody* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

BLINDNESS
A man goes blind at the wheel of a car, and, one by one, the surrounding population—perhaps, who knows, the rest of the civilized world—follows suit. Whatever the cause, civilization itself begins to fray. A doctor (Mark Ruffalo), now blind, is quarantined in a secure facility, hemmed in by armed guards, and forced first into proximity and then into open discord with a group of fellow-sufferers. The movie, written by Don McKellar and directed by Fernando Meirelles, is adapted from the novel by the Nobel laureate José Saramago, and it preserves both the bones of the plot and some of the authorial strategies—no character, for instance, is allotted a name. The book's insistence on the helpless moral numbing of society is flattened onscreen into a kind of savage dullness, and much of Meirelles's film, especially its sagging middle portion, comes across as a parable that badly wants (and badly fails) to be a story. Julianne Moore plays the doctor's wife, who can still see but neglects, for some reason, to say so. With a miscast Gael García Bernal, as the young tyrant of the blind ward, and Danny Glover, as his wise old opposite number.—*Anthony Lane* (10/6/08) (In limited release.)

BODY OF LIES
This shrewd and tightly drawn anti-terror thriller, directed by Ridley Scott, suggests that the C.I.A. has all the technical advantages but not enough of the human intelligence to combat Mideast terrorism. The field agent Roger Ferris (Leonardo DiCaprio) is just about the best there is, but his efforts on the ground are often confounded by a higher-up, Hoffman (Russell Crowe), who manages him via cell phone and laptop from the Washington suburbs. Hoffman, an American consumer of advanced technology and vast amounts of food, is too impatient; in the end, he's dependent on help from the brilliant but secretive head of Jordanian intelligence (the English actor Mark Strong, in a witty performance). The movie has the usual tropes of the genre—surveillance shots from drones, S.U.V.s tearing across the desert, explosions, scenes of torture—but Scott manages the space and timing better than most thriller directors. William Monahan adapted David Ignatius's novel. Shot in Morocco.—*D.D.* (10/13/08) (In wide release.)

CHANGELING
Angelina Jolie stays perfectly in character (too perfectly—her performance is dull) as Christine Collins, a single mother and telephone-company supervisor in 1928 Los Angeles whose nine-year-old son is kidnapped and who then has to suffer the absurd humiliation of the L.A.P.D.'s trying to force her to accept a look-alike as a substitute. Clint Eastwood directed with extraordinary control—the mood and tone and lighting are precisely matched from one scene to the next. But the movie is dutiful rather than exciting: it's an austerely made feminist protest drama, in which the police and their various stooges condescend to Christine as a woman and therefore as someone of weak understanding. There's also a creepy subplot about a mass murderer in the desert, one of whose victims may be the missing boy, but, in the end, the movie congratulates us for in-

dignant feelings that we already have. With John Malkovich as an impersonally benevolent Presbyterian minister who helps Christine. J. Michael Straczynski's screenplay is based on a true story.—*D.D.* (10/27/08) (In wide release.)

CITIZEN RUTH

Alexander Payne's 1996 satire, about a pregnant derelict caught between factions in the abortion wars, is anything but jaundiced: poking both where it tickles and where it hurts, Payne evokes empathy without pity and tenderness without sentiment. Laura Dern is brilliant as Ruth Stoops, a small-town paragon of irresponsibility, who, owing to glue sniffing, drinking, and general recklessness, has lost custody of her children and is homeless, under arrest, and under pressure from a liberal judge to terminate her pregnancy. By chance, she shares a cell with anti-abortion protesters, who bail her out and make her case a cause célèbre; when pro-choice activists then spring into action, too, Ruth, who wanted nothing more than an abortion and a fix, is suddenly thrust into the national spotlight. Through sharp dialogue, carefully modulated performances by a remarkable cast (including Tippi Hedren as a feminist ice queen and Burt Reynolds as a pure-smarm preacher), and an amazing eye for telling details and class differences, Payne finds the humanity behind the stereotypes—but he's after bigger game. His local story becomes a cross-section of national attitudes, values, and principles, and comically dramatizes a paradox: as freedoms guaranteed by law are upheld in court, the private becomes glaringly public and the personal political, at the risk of what may be the most basic right of all, to be left the hell alone.—*R.B.* (MOMA; Oct. 29-31.)

THE DUCHESS

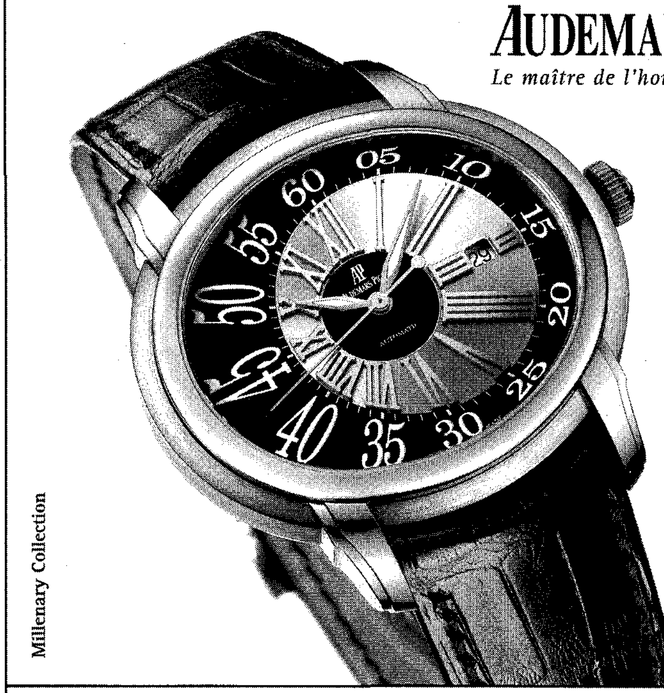
A slice from the life of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire (Keira Knightley), who, we are told, cut a swath through English high society in the second half of the eighteenth century. The swath, as represented in Saul Dibb's film, seems less than formidable; the heroine's political acumen is displayed early on, in repartee at dinner, but then left largely to wilt, and her most memorable social appearance is a drunken stagger, during which her hedge-size wig catches fire. Ralph Fiennes plays her husband in a clever and, one suspects, accurate portrayal of a chilly pragmatist bent on producing an heir. If there is dullness at the heart of the film, that may be due less to the director (though he should have cut it by a good ten minutes) than to the source material; attempts to link Georgiana's story with a broken royal marriage of more recent vintage are tendentious at best. The most diverting character is Lady Elizabeth Foster (Hayley Atwell), the Duke's mistress, who moved in to create a ménage à trois, and who should have been the heroine of this movie. Atwell is bewitching enough to have held it in her spell. With Charlotte Rampling and, as Charles James Fox, a sly Simon McBurney.—*A.L.* (In wide release.)

EAGLE EYE

A sloppy but entertaining technology-gone-wild thriller, about a slacker (Shia LaBeouf) who teams up with a threatened mom (Michelle Monaghan) when they receive sinister instructions from a disembodied voice. The film, directed by D. J. Caruso, is packed with action sequences that recall hits of the past (such as "North by Northwest" and "Enemy of the State") and which are so swiftly and energetically staged that their familiarity is almost welcome. The twists and turns of the plot—whom the two protagonists are running from, what they're doing—are more manufactured than written, but Caruso and the host of screenwriters craft the film's theme of paranoid surveillance for speed, not plausibility. They fail to say anything Orwellian about the times we live in; the hectic overplotting is so consumer-driven that it nearly devours itself.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

EGGED ON

Lost for four decades, this short silent comedy from 1926, starring and co-directed by Charley Bowers, surprisingly and at times wondrously blends animation with whiz-bang live-action gags. Bowers plays a chipper yet hapless inventor who seeks fame and fortune by building a machine that will make eggs unbreakable. Along the way, he bumps into the woman he loves, and the resulting pursuit, though brief, is a masterwork of visual wit. Bowers and his collaborator, H. L. Muller, use a panoply of editing tricks to



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contract time; their theme is the convergence of nature and technology, which they often render surrealistically. (André Breton was a fan.) The drama is inconsequential and the characters thin, but, at its best, Bowers's film, with a Rube Goldberg-esque contraption as its centerpiece, remarkably foreshadows the cartoon madness of Looney Tunes.—*R.B.* (French Institute Alliance Française; Nov. 1.)

FILTH AND WISDOM

Exciting news for those who never tire of Madonna's self-transformations: here is yet another change of tack. For her latest trick, she has become a film director, or has, at any rate, made faltering steps in that direction. The hero of her tale, Andriy, is played by Eugene Hutz, the explosively hairy front man of a band called Gogol Bordello. (That name itself has more rough poetry than anything in the movie.) Andriy shares an apartment in London with Holly (Holly Weston), a dancer, and Juliette (Vicky McClure), an ordinary kleptomaniac pharmaceutical assistant. Also thrown into the mix are Juliette's heartsick employer (Inder Manocha) and, horror of horrors, a blind and lachrymose poet (Richard E. Grant). Madonna scholars will be unsurprised to learn that sexual conduct is limited to the sadomasochistic. Somewhere in this stew of stories is an attempt to savor the many ingredients of a modern multicultural city, as well as an old-style injunction to follow your dream, but neither is discernible for long, owing to the ham-fisted nature of the filmmaking. Lighting, script, and performances seem unreleasably poor, and there is a shameful dabbling in ethnic stereotypes; the one proud virtue of the enterprise, in fact, is a running time of little more than eighty minutes.—*A.L.* (10/20/08) (In wide release.)

FLASH OF GENIUS

In the past, the affable effortlessness of Greg Kinnear's performances successfully masked the nuanced actor's tightly focussed range. In this film, Kinnear gets around his amiable veneer in the role of the electrical engineer Robert Kearns, who developed the intermittent windshield wiper and spent years fighting the big automakers for recognition. Kinnear plays him as a stubborn idealist, obsessive and anxious in his pursuit for justice, and his performance holds the story together. But the film, directed by Marc Abraham and written by Philip Railsback (based on a *New Yorker* article by John Seabrook), is slow going. It's so meticulous about getting the David-vs.-Goliath atmosphere right that it neglects to build any real drama. For all Kearns's heroic sacrifices and heartbreaking missteps, the film offers only a muted sense of the man, whom it turns audience-friendly for only a moment of triumph.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

GALA

Jean-Daniel Pollet's exquisite, droll, and bittersweet short film, from 1961, is both a triumph of aestheticism and a surprising view of a primordially multicultural France. The title festivities take place in a grungy dance hall run by a black man (Gésip Légitimus), who, as captured in Pollet's graceful tracking shots and arresting high angles, strides suavely through it with the commanding cool of a cowboy on the plains. His clientele is diverse, his floor show (including the legendary stripper Dolly Bell) racy, his jazz band hot, and Pollet films the throng of dancers so trenchantly that Antoine Duhamel's infectiously bouncy score seems to appear onscreen. Indeed, the rhythmic flair with which people merely walk through the film suggests that Pollet missed his calling as the last of the great musical directors. The owner's swagger is leavened by the performance of the sad-eyed introvert Claude Melki, Pollet's fetish actor, as a janitor with a tawdry side business. A confectioner with a cynic's eye for hidden melancholy, Pollet locates the aching tenderness beneath formal gestures and hints at the bitterness and toil that patrons and clients alike seek to submerge in a few moments of programmed ecstasy. In French.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; Nov. 2.)

HAPPY-GO-LUCKY

Poppy (Sally Hawkins), the single, thirty-year-old London schoolteacher in Mike Leigh's comedy, bounces on a trampoline after school, but she doesn't need much of a lift—she's already airborne. Is possession of the happiness gene enough to get you through life without harm? Or, putting it less grandly, can a woman as cheerful as Poppy serve as the protagonist of a full-length movie? Leigh, who directs with a carefree assurance (after much rehearsal with the actors), matches his heroine against a series of adversaries—an iron-willed flamenco dancer, a bully boy in her class, a driving instructor (Eddie Marsan) who is so rule-bound that he's choking with rage—all of whom try to overcome unhappiness by behaving aggressively or living as rigidly as possible. The movie is not an argument for chaos; it's an argument for making one's way through life with a relaxed will and an open heart. With Alexis Zegerman as Poppy's dyspeptic roommate.—*D.D.* (10/13/08) (In wide release.)

HELL DRIVERS

Elemental and involving. This headlong melodrama, set in pre-swinging England (it was released in 1957), delves into a backwater British trucking operation that fosters alpha-male competition for mercenary ends. The writer-director, Cy Endfield, conjures an atmosphere of desperation from hardscrabble locations and elicits raw, volatile feelings from an ensemble that includes Stanley Baker, as the tough, melancholy hero, just out of prison and hoping to go straight, and Patrick McGoohan, as the vicious trucking foreman and lead driver. Gordon Jackson, Sidney James, and an eager young Sean Connery stand out as truckers who plow their frustrations into roughhouse comedy and a brutalizing esprit de corps. Herbert Lom offers some welcome warmth as the Italian odd man out: he befriends the new guy, courts the company secretary (Peggy Cummins), and, under stress, maintains his loyalties to the end. Endfield buttresses thin subplots with vivid performers such as the young David McCallum (the hero's kid brother) and Jill Ireland (the waitress at the local diner). He wisely avoids preaching; with its VistaVision views of rattletrap rigs careering down country roads, this is a tip-top action movie, not a sermon or a screed.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; Nov. 1-3.)

HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL 3: SENIOR YEAR

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

LET THE RIGHT ONE IN

A remarkably moving horror tale, about a pale, bullied twelve-year-old boy (Kåre Hedebrant) and his first love (Lina Leandersson), who happens to be a vampire. The film is set in 1982, in a snowy suburb of Stockholm, and the director, Tomas Alfredson, captures the dark, eerie stillness of the dead of winter in long, quiet takes, endowing the loneliness of the two main characters with a touching charm. John Ajvide Lindqvist, adapting his own novel, wisely keeps away from the usual histrionic violence, and the few gruesome surprises are poetically memorable. The movie deals mainly with the problems of becoming a teen-ager (such as the quest for self-confidence and the meaning of loyalty), and it does so with artfulness and sincerity. The results are entrancing. In Swedish.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center.)

RACHEL GETTING MARRIED

The new Jonathan Demme film is one of his slighter and more oddball affairs. It stars Anne Hathaway as Kym, who leaves rehab—where she is being treated for drug addiction—to attend the wedding of her sister Rachel (Rosemarie DeWitt). This takes place at the family home in Connecticut, which has become, for the occasion, a multiethnic menagerie of liberal optimists, many bearing musical instruments. Not surprisingly, the festive air is spoiled by the intrusion of Kym, who feels constrained by her protective father (Bill Irwin) and then flashes into fearsome combat with her mother (Debra Winger). The movie is too long, and often wearying to watch, taking its visual cues from the unappeasable restlessness of the heroine. Yet the scene in which she is welcomed home, after a car accident, to be bathed and consoled by her sister without a word has a real, if exhausted, tenderness; the smarting emotions on show here are seldom contrived, and anyone versed in family conflict—that is, anyone with a family—will flinch at those moments when Demme cuts close to the bone.—*A.L.* (10/6/08) (In limited release.)

RELIGULOUS

This documentary, in which the libertarian comedian and talk-show host Bill Maher, along with the director Larry Charles, challenges the legitimacy of religion, is a globe-trotting conversation starter. Maher's softhearted satirical dig at faith and the people who espouse it focusses primarily on literal in-

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
FIGHTING WORDS

UNITED ARTISTS/PHOTOFEST

Anthony Mann's 1957 movie about an American platoon in the Korean conflict, "Men in War," screening on Nov. 1 in the series "To Save and Project: The Sixth MOMA International Festival of Film Preservation," is a classic example of downbeat fifties Hollywood filmmaking. The film was stunningly shot (by Ernest Haller) in black-and-white and chronicles a single day, from bright morning to dusk and then to the following dawn; the musical score, by Elmer Bernstein, is harsh, sometimes discordant. The movie centers on the wrenching psychological struggle between two kinds of men—Robert Ryan's tough but humane lieutenant, who wants to lead his platoon to safety, and Aldo Ray's cynical sergeant, a killer who assumes the worst about everybody. When Ray's instincts prove to be right again and again, Ryan (who tells him, "It takes your kind to win a war") is brought to the edge of despair. Many of the combat sequences, shot in a coherent and unified space, are a pure distillation of fear. War on the ground has rarely been done much better than this. With a screenplay by Philip Yordan, who was collaborating with and fronting for his blacklisted friend Ben Maddow.

—*David Denby*

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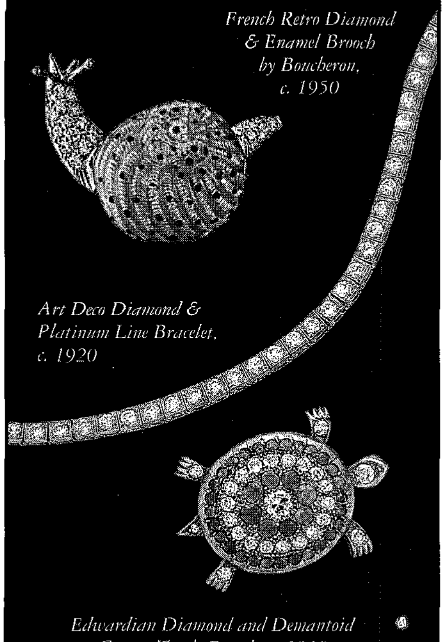

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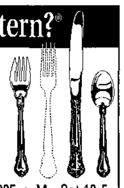

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terpretations of Bible stories (such as those of Noah's ark and Jonah and the whale). His interview technique isn't argumentative—he sees religion as antirational—and his comedy plays out as frustration rather than as mean-spiritedness. The filmmakers have smartly chosen to shoot in locations where the faithful gather, and the movie benefits from its you-are-there style. In an odd note of irony, the film is, in effect, preaching to the unconverted.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

ROCKNROLLA
Unable to shake off a chronic fixation on criminals, whether petty or domineering, the British director Guy Ritchie—who made "Snatch" and "Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels"—has returned to his fantastical vision of a London populated almost entirely by gangsters. Their names read like weak imitations of Runyon: One Two (Gerard Butler), Mumbles (Idris Elba), and Handsome Bob (Tom Hardy). These are lowly folk, under the thumbs of major players like Lenny (Tom Wilkinson) and the Russian interloper Uri (Karel Roden), but what binds them together, in one scrappy family, is the director's invitation to view their thuggery as consistently amusing. That can be done—"Guys and Dolls" itself aimed at something similar—but Ritchie's command of tone is far too unsteady, and his taste for lowlife longueurs much too indulgent, to keep the movie on track, and it crumples into self-parody long before the end. With Thandie Newton, ravishing yet implausible, as an accountant with dirty morals.—*A.L.* (10/20/08) (In wide release.)

ROSEMARY'S BABY
Pregnant women sometimes look at their men as if to say, "What did you do to me?" Rosemary (Mia Farrow), the Omaha-born girl who's now living in Manhattan, has reason to wonder, and this satirical gothic thriller, written and directed by Roman Polanski, from Ira Levin's novel, is told from her point of view. Rosemary's actor husband (John Cassavetes) conspires with a coven, drugs her, and mates her with Satan, in exchange for a Broadway hit. It's genuinely funny, yet it's also scary, especially for young women: it plays on their paranoid vulnerabilities. The queasy and the grisly are mixed with its entertaining hipness. Farrow is enchanting in her fragility: she's just about perfect for her role. And the darkly handsome Cassavetes is ideal as the narcissist who makes the deal for a cloven-hoofed infant. Also with Ruth Gordon, Sidney Blackmer, Maurice Evans, Ralph Bellamy, Patsy Kelly, Charles Grodin, and Elisha Cook.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; Oct. 31-Nov. 6.)

SYNECDOCHE, NEW YORK
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

W.
Oliver Stone's panoramic biography of the President as a hollow shell. Josh Brolin, as George Bush, works hard at shaping his body into effective imitation: he thrusts out his chin and flexes his shoulders, walks crotch forward, like a dismounted broncobuster, and speaks in short gusts, as if each little group of words were shot from a Colt .45. Brolin can't get below the surface, but perhaps no actor could—the way the movie has been conceived, there are no depths to plumb. Stanley Weiser's screenplay hits the Freudian family-drama aspects of the Bush saga over and over and in the most obvious way: the hard-drinking, pleasure-loving scapegrace son can never get enough approval from his stiff-jointed father, George Herbert Walker Bush (James Cromwell), and doesn't feel at ease until he redoes the Iraq war as a reckless adventure. What we never see is Bush's cunning; many scenes with the inner circle of advisers feel like a didactic school play. Richard Dreyfuss, however, is devastating as Dick Cheney, and the cast also includes Jeffrey Wright (Colin Powell), Scott Glenn (Donald Rumsfeld), Thandie Newton (Condoleezza Rice), Toby Jones (Karl Rove), and Elizabeth Banks (Laura Bush).—*D.D.* (10/27/08) (In wide release.)

WHAT JUST HAPPENED
Hollywood, not for the first time, stares at itself in the mirror. Robert De Niro plays Ben, a producer with problems. These range from the professional, such as the parlous previews of his latest film, to the woundingly intimate, such as his unfaded love for an ex-wife (Robin Wright Penn), who has turned her attentions not just elsewhere but to a mere screenwriter (Stanley Tucci). Real stars, including Sean Penn and a Moses-bearded Bruce Willis, play versions of themselves, which adds lightly to the air of authenticity, yet the over-all atmosphere is too thin and stale to be refreshing. The director is Barry Levinson, and the script was adapted by Art Linson from his own memoirs of the movie business, so nobody could accuse them of not knowing their subject; yet their familiarity gives the project the fatal coziness of an insiders' sport, with few of the one-liners hitting home. A first-rate cast (which includes Catherine Keener and John Turturro) is deployed to press a satirical point with which most of us already agree. As for De Niro, he lacks the expansiveness for the role; if you like your movie producers to be monsters, not whiners, forget this, skip back fifty years or so, and try Rod Steiger in "The Big Knife."—*A.L.* (10/20/08) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

BEVERLY HILLS CHIHUAHUA: In wide release. **MAX PAYNE:** In wide release. **PRIDE AND GLORY:** In wide release. **STRANDED:** Film Forum.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—In première. Oct. 31 and Nov. 3-4 at 7 and 9:15 and Nov. 1-2 at 5, 7, and 9:15: "Monks—The Transatlantic Feedback" (2006, Dietmar Post and Lucia Palacios). ♦ The films of Jean-Daniel Pollet. Except where noted, all films are in French. Oct. 31 at 7:15 and Nov. 1 at 9: "Méditerranée" (1963) and "Bassae" (1964). ♦ Oct. 31 at 9, Nov. 2 at 4, and Nov. 4 at 6:45: "Pourvu Qu'On Ait L'Ivresse" (1958) and "L'Amour C'Est Gai, L'Amour C'Est Triste" (1971). ♦ Nov. 1 at 4:30: "Six in Paris" ("Paris Vu Par . . .") (1965, Jean-Daniel Pollet, Claude Chabrol, Jean Douchet, Jean-Luc Godard, Eric Rohmer, and Jean Rouch). ♦ Nov. 2 at 8:30: "Gala" (†) and "Six in Paris" ("Paris Vu Par . . .") (1965). ♦ Nov. 1 at 6:30 and Nov. 3 at 7:15: "Le Horla" (1966), "L'Ordre" (1973; in French and Greek), and "Au Père Lachaise" (1986). ♦ Nov. 2 at 6:30, Nov. 3 at 9:15, and Nov. 4 at 9: "Ceux d'en Face" (2000). ♦ Special Halloween midnight screening. Oct. 31: "The Devils" (1971, Ken Russell), introduced by the director.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Treasures from a Chest." Oct. 31 at 7: The curator Serge Bromberg presents rare animated films, including "Fantasmagorie" (1908, Émile Cohl; silent), "Halloween" (1931, Dick Huemer), and "The Cuckoo Murder Case" (1930, Ub Iwerks). ♦ The films of Asia Argento. Nov. 1 at 3, 6, and 9: "New Rose Hotel" (1998, Abel Ferrara). ♦ Nov. 2 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Cindy: The Doll Is Mine" (2005, Bertrand Bonello; in French) and "Scarlet Diva" (2003, Argento). ♦ Nov. 4 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Heart Is Deceitful Above All Things" (2005, Argento). ♦ The films of Teuvo Tulio. Nov. 3 at 6:50 and 9:15: "The Song of the Scarlet Flower" (1938; in Finnish).

ELECTRONIC ARTS INTERMIX
535 W. 22nd St. (212-337-0680)—An evening with Ken Jacobs. Oct. 29 at 6:30: A program of short films and live film-projection performances, including "Anaglyph Tom" (2008). The works being screened should not be viewed by individuals with epilepsy or seizure disorders.

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Oct. 29-30 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10: "Lola Montès" (1955, Max Ophüls; in French and German). ♦ Oct. 31-Nov. 6 at 1:30, 4:10, 7, and 9:35: "Rosemary's Baby" (†).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"Treasures from a Chest." Nov. 1 at 7: The curator Serge Bromberg presents rare animated films, including "Egged On" (†), "Fantasmagorie" (1908, Émile Cohl; silent), "The Sinking of the Lusitania"

(1918, Winsor McCay; silent), and "Cartoon Factory (Koko the Clown)" (1924, Dave and Max Fleischer; silent).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. Oct. 29-Nov. 4 (call for showtimes): "Nosferatu the Vampyre" (1979, Werner Herzog; in German). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Oct. 31-Nov. 1: "Twilight Zone: The Movie" (1983, Joe Dante, John Landis, George Miller, and Steven Spielberg). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Nov. 4 at 8: "Chisholm 72: Unbought and Unbossed" (2004, Shola Lynch), introduced by the director.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." Oct. 29-31 at 1:30: "Citizen Ruth" (†). ♦ "To Save and Project." Oct. 29 at 6: "The Secret Agent" (1983, Jacki Ochs). ♦ Oct. 29 at 7:30: "That Man of Mine" (1947, Leonard Anderson), followed by a discussion between Ruby Dee and the historian Pearl Bowser. ♦ Oct. 30 at 6: "Jimmy the Gent" (1934, Michael Curtiz). ♦ Oct. 30 at 7:30: "Millions Like Us" (1943, Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat). ♦ Oct. 31 at 6: "The River" (1929, Frank Borzage). ♦ Oct. 31 at 7:30: "I Am Curious (Yellow)" (1967, Vilgot Sjöman; in Swedish). ♦ Nov. 1 at 2: "Men in War" (1957, Anthony Mann). ♦ Nov. 1 at 4:15, Nov. 2 at 3, and Nov. 3 at 8: "Hell Drivers" (†) and "Inflation" (1942, Cy Endfield). ♦ Nov. 1 at 6:45 and Nov. 3 at 6:15: "Dry Summer" (1964, Metin Erksan; in Turkish). ♦ Nov. 1 at 8:30: "Touki Bouki" (1973, Djibril Diop Mambéty; in Wolof). ♦ Nov. 2 at 1: "Western Union" (1941, Fritz Lang). ♦ Nov. 2 at 5:15: "Hearts of the World" (1918, D. W. Griffith; silent). ♦ ContemporAsian. Oct. 29 at 6: "Slingshot" (2007, Brillante Mendoza; in Tagalog). ♦ The nonfiction films of Amos Gitai. Except where noted, all films are in Hebrew. Oct. 29 at 8 and Oct. 30 at 8:30: "News from Home/News from House" (2006; in English, Arabic, and Hebrew). ♦ Oct. 30 at 4 and Nov. 2 at 5: "Kippur, War Memories" (1997). ♦ Oct. 31 at 4:30 and Nov. 1 at 2: "Pineapple" (1983). ♦ Oct. 31 at 6:30 and Nov. 1 at 8: "The Arena of Murder" (1996). ♦ Oct. 31 at 8:15 and Nov. 1 at 6: "In the Valley of the Wupper" (1993; in German). ♦ Nov. 1 at 4 and Nov. 2 at 3:15: "Field Diary" (1982). ♦ Nov. 2 at 1: "Zion, Auto-Emancipation" (1998).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Oct. 31-Nov. 1: "A Nightmare On Elm Street" (1984, Wes Craven).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Paul Schrader's Personal Choice." Nov. 2 at 1 and 5:30: "American Gigolo" (1980, Schrader). ♦ Nov. 2 at 3:15 and 8: "Diary of a Country Priest" (1951, Robert Bresson; in French).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—The films of Andrzej Wajda. All films are in Polish. Oct. 29 at 2: "The Shadow Line" (1976). ♦ Oct. 29 at 4:15: "The Wedding" (1973). ♦ Oct. 31 at 1 and Nov. 4 at 8:45: "The Conductor" (1980). ♦ Oct. 31 at 3 and Nov. 2 at 7: "Man of Marble" (1977). ♦ Oct. 31 at 6:15: "The Maids of Wilko" (1979). ♦ Nov. 1 at 7 and Nov. 4 at 1: "The Promised Land" (1975). ♦ Nov. 3 at 12:30 and 9: "Rough Treatment, a.k.a. Without Anesthesia" (1978). ♦ Nov. 3 at 3: "Man of Iron" (1981). ♦ *Film Comment* Selects. Oct. 31 at 9: "The Changeling" (1980, Peter Medak). ♦ "Cinematic Opera/Operatic Cinema." Nov. 2 at 2: "Ivan the Terrible," Parts 1 and 2 (1944-46, Sergei M. Eisenstein; in Russian), followed by a discussion with the historian Ian Christie.

READINGS AND TALKS

TIPA PROJECT READING
TIPA, which stands for Toward International Peace Through the Arts and is the work of the marketer turned activist Stan Tannen, presents a pre-Election Day tribute to Tim Russert, the noted broadcaster, who died earlier this year, at the age of fifty-eight. The actors Marian Seldes, Eli Wal-

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James Morone - *Brown*

History: A Century before 9/11—America's First Age of Terror
Beverly Gage - *Yale*

Music: The 20th Century's Greatest Work & the Riot It Sparked
Thomas Kelly - *Harvard*

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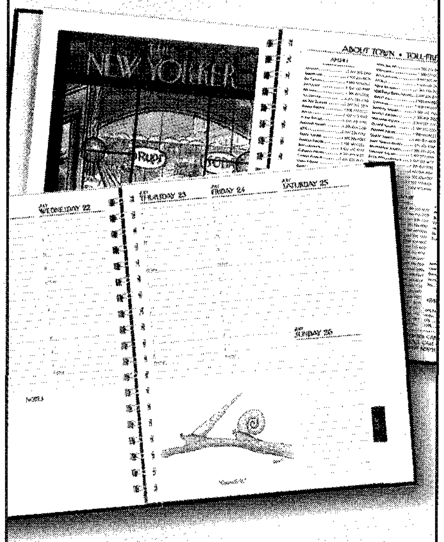

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lach, Fritz Weaver, and Tammy Grimes will offer selections from the two-volume collection "American Speeches: Political Oratory from Abraham Lincoln to Bill Clinton." (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. No tickets necessary. Oct. 28 at 12:30.)

GREAT HALL

Edgar M. Bronfman, the author of "Hope, Not Fear: A Path to Jewish Renaissance," talks about moral courage with Irshad Manji, the author of "The Trouble with Islam Today: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith." (Cooper Union, 7 E. 7th St. No tickets necessary. Oct. 29 at 6:30.)

KGB BAR

The literary journal *Open City* presents Sarah Gardner Borden and John O'Connor, who will read from their short fiction. (85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary. Oct. 29 at 7.)

POETS HOUSE

The downtown library and literary center, which is set to open a new home in Battery Park City, continues its off-site programming on Oct. 30 with a two-part event devoted to contemporary poetry from the Middle East and Asia. Starting at 6:30, Tina Chang, Nathalie Handal, and Ravi Shankar, the editors of the new anthology "Language for a New Century," join Kimiko Hahn and Khaled Mattawa for a discussion. At 8, those poets and others read from their work. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. Tickets at the door.)

"POEMS & PINTS"

The Poetry Society of America and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's new monthly reading series at Fraunces Tavern continues with appearances by Paul Muldoon (the poetry editor of this magazine) and Mark Strand. (54 Pearl St. For more information, call 212-254-9628. Nov. 4 at 6:30.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

HALLOWEEN

The parade in Greenwich Village has been an annual event since 1973, and each year it gets bigger and bigger, like some kind of unstoppable monster. Hundreds of puppets and floats and countless folks in a wide array of costumes are expected, along with more than fifty bands. Properly attired individuals can enter the parade on Sixth Avenue, between Spring and Canal Streets, from 6:30 to 8:30 P.M. Spectators can start jostling anytime for a spot along Sixth Avenue to take in the spectacle, which gets under way at 7. (Oct. 31. For more information, visit www.halloween-nyc.com.) ♦ Revellers of a more bookish stripe are welcome at McNally Jackson Books' second annual Literary Halloween Party, which will feature horror-story and costume contests (come as your favorite author or literary hero), along with readings and refreshments. (52 Prince St. Oct. 31, from 6:30 to 8:30.)

EDITIONS / ARTISTS' BOOKS FAIR

The impulse to judge a book by its cover will be hard to resist this weekend, as more than sixty contemporary dealers and publishers converge on west Chelsea. Among the events planned during the fair are a screen-printing demonstration by the young portraitist Mickalene Thomas (her subject: Michelle Obama) and a talk by the renowned sculptor Richard Tuttle. (The Tunnel, 269 Eleventh Ave., at 27th St. Oct 31-Nov. 2. For more information, visit eabfair.com.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Estimated prices at the two big auction houses' print sales continue to reflect the expensive habits of art collectors. **Sotheby's** sale (Oct. 30-31) is led by a rendition of Edvard Munch's most famous image, "The Scream," in a stark black-and-white lithograph from 1895. The more than five hundred lots also encompass an extensive group of contemporary prints, including several screen-print portfolios (Marilyn, Mao, and the electric chair) by Warhol. The house then gets down to business with the first of next week's blockbuster sales of Impressionist and modern art (Nov. 3), in a formidable evening auction that includes Munch's sinister "Vampire," from 1894, as well as one of Degas's enchanting ballerina paintings ("Danseuse au Repos") and a Cubist harlequin by Picasso. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ At **Christie's**, Munch's sensual and macabre "Madonna" holds court, in a sale of prints (Oct. 28-29) that includes a large selection of Picasso works, as well as a group of early-twentieth-century American prints from the collection of Wolfgang A. Herz. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Swann** looks to the past; its print auction (Oct. 31) focusses on Old Masters, featuring works by Rembrandt and Whistler, among others. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.) ♦ The British auctioneer **Bloomsbury** holds its third New York sale of the season (Oct. 29), this one devoted to early-twentieth-century Russian literature (books, letters, manuscripts) and art (prints, posters, drawings), and featuring a group of lots connected to Diaghilev's innovative Ballets Russes (whose centenary is next year). (6 W. 48th St. 212-719-1000.)

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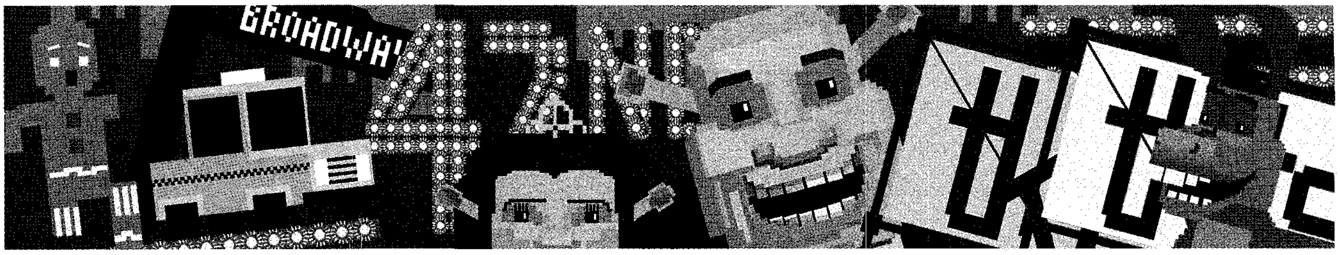


ON THE HORIZON

THE THEATRE
BEING GREEN
Nov. 8

David Lindsay-Abaire wrote the book and lyrics and Jeanine Tesori wrote the music for "Shrek the Musical," which continues the ogre's evolution from William Steig character to movie hero to Broadway leading man. (212-239-6200.)

MOVIES
WAVING HELLO
Nov. 12-16

New York's festivals, commercial releases, and sponsored showcases have trouble keeping up with the pace of French movie production. BAM's "New French Films" series is a much needed supplement, featuring five acclaimed works, including Jacques Doillon's "Just Anybody" and Arnaud and Jean-Marie Larrieu's "Voyage to the Pyrenees." (718-636-4100.)

ART
CHARACTER BUILDING
Nov. 15-Dec. 20

For thirty years, the American photographer Cindy Sherman has been making nuanced portraits of a single model—herself—with the aid of elaborate makeup and costumes. In her first show of new work in four years, at Metro Pictures, Sherman turns her eye to the subject of aging. (212-206-7100.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
BREAK A LEG
Nov. 19-23

Carnegie Hall's Bernstein Festival knows no bounds. Fans of the composer-conductor's classical works can walk down the street to City Center to take in one of six performances of his Broadway musical "On the Town," presented by the "Encores!" series. (212-581-1212.)

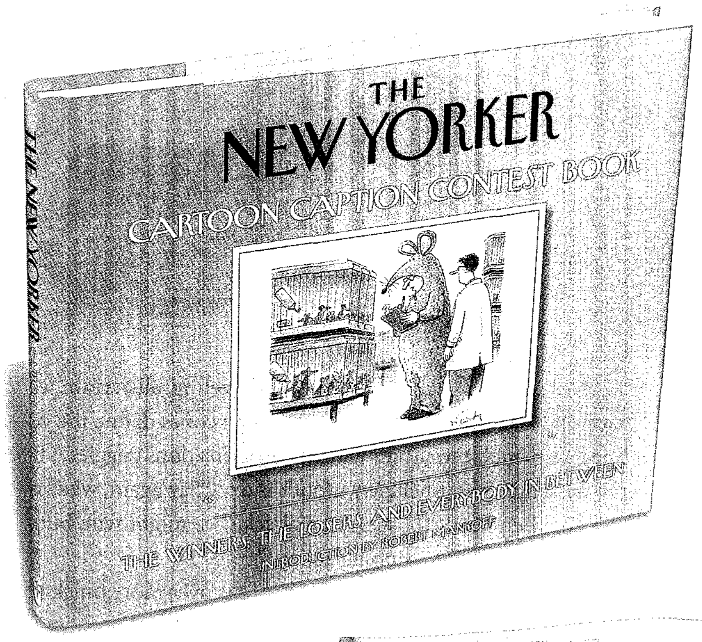
NIGHT LIFE
RED-LIGHT DISTRICT
Dec. 27-30

After palling around with the international pop star Madonna (and appearing in the Material Girl's most recent feature film, "Filth and Wisdom"), the wild Gogol Bordello front man Eugene Hutz is back on the road with his multiethnic gypsy-punk band. The group—which has drawn comparisons to the Pogues and the Clash—will perform three nights at Webster Hall next month. (212-307-7171.)

"Shrek the Musical," at the Broadway Theatre.

TOMBY

THE WINNERS, THE LOSERS,
AND EVERYBODY IN BETWEEN



THE NEW YORKER
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THE WINNERS, THE LOSERS, AND EVERYBODY IN BETWEEN
INTRODUCTION BY ROBERT MANKOFF

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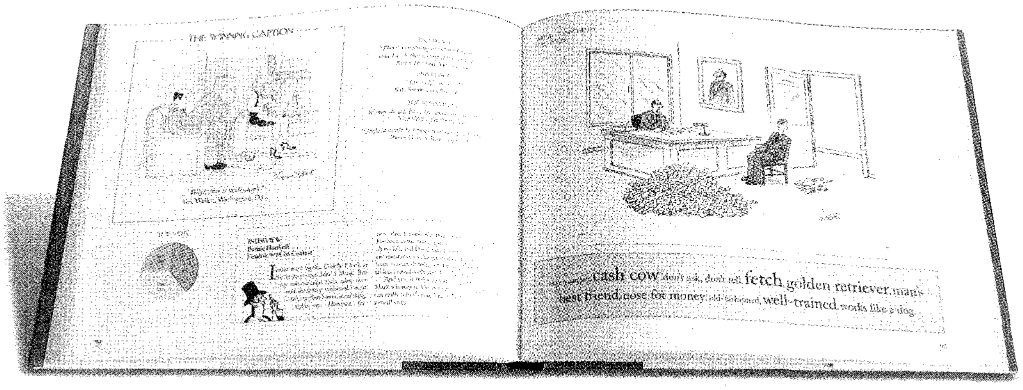

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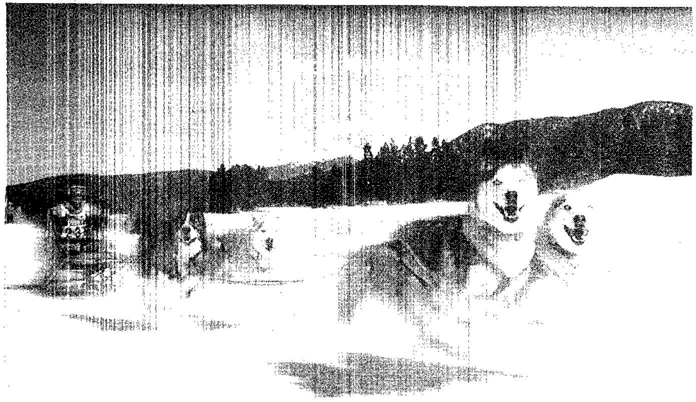

BY MORT GERBERG

New Colorado Adventures

I am Günther. No last name. No need.

Surely you already recognize me from cereal boxes: Blond hair, blue eyes, dazzling white smile, body like Adonis. Also you know my world records and ski techniques, which I invent and perform internationally. For example, my renowned Double Reverse Collarbone™, which I employ in 1978, to *wedel* down Matterhorn backwards.

Now also I am "Colorado Winter Smörgåsbording, Ltd." Many winter recreations for clients, but I myself prefer skiing only. No question, it is best winter sport. No reason to do any different one.

Then, last February comes Nina for our Ski Week Special. As always, I suggest Winter Park, Keystone, Steamboat, and other renowned Colorado mountains. Nina shakes her black curls and laughs. The sound is icy, crystal water bubbling over stones at the side of a stream. "Oh, I've already *done* them," she waves. "Snowboarded Beaver Creek, and Breckenridge and Copper and.... This winter vacation I want to ski but I want to try *other* things, too."

Ach! Schöne Kohlkopf! Sacrilege! I argue that Colorado skiing is perfect winter activity, so is illogical to exchange for anything else. To emphasize, I flex my jaw and make my famous Parallel Sneer Turn™. I say my philosophy absolutely forbids me to fulfill her request. Nina makes wide her hazel eyes and urges, "*Please*, Günther?"

Next morning, at Snowmass, Nina and I are dogsledding, sitting together, bundled in blankets, gliding briskly through sparkling snowdrifts. The musher stands behind us shouting at ten yelping huskies that pull happily our sled through sprays of snow. It is interesting, but I do not admit to her. "Being accurate, the only reason I agree to do, Nina, is prove to clients my philosophy." She tells me she thinks dogs' bark is worse than mine.

In Rocky Mountain National Park, on snowshoes we hike to Bear Lake. The only sound in lush forest silence is crunching of powder under our footfalls. We are at 9,500 feet, poling up a slight incline. I feel small beads of perspiration on my forehead and my heart pounds. *Can Nina hear it?* I am surprised that I breathe so hard. However, to show off my energy, I run fast up the slope, to execute my popular Bavarian Screechenhalt™—then fall, and quickly leap up. "This I do on purpose," I laugh, "to balance my boredom. Snowshoeing may serve as warm-ups for skiing, but there is no excitement." Nina's eyes twinkle.

Next day, Nina is driver in a four-wheeling, all-terrain Jeep ice race on frozen Georgetown Lake. Orange cones define the course. Spectators mob the shores and scream. Nina dons goggles. I buckle the passenger's seat belt. My mouth is dry. "Say again, what is precise goal here?" "Well," she shouts back, "we might win, but we're *really* here for heart-stopping action!"

She stomps on accelerator. The race is over more quick than it takes for my heart to restart. Once I skied ninety-four miles an hour to win Olympic gold, but compared to Jeep ice race, that was like curb-parking in downtown Denver.

"Well?" Nina demands. "As exciting as shooting avalanches at A-Basin, right?" *Ja, I think.*

Tethered to snaking ropes, Nina, 230 feet off ground, inches up a frozen waterfall, chopping grips in the vertical wall with an axe and kicking toeholds with boot crampons. She showers me with ice pellets, for I am immediately below her. *But why?*

We are daredevils today at Ouray Ice Park competing with others to summit first, cheered on by disbelieving crowds. I clutch my own axe, pull myself up another five millimeters, heave over the top, and flop, gasping, alongside Nina. "Fun, eh, Günthie?" she exults. "Now let's go to East Vail and climb *their* 120-foot pillar. It's called the Fang."

"You go," I say, giving up. "I must take it now easy, perhaps with single black slalom."

Nina says *auf Wiedersehen*. Her philosophy of trying new things turns out not too bad. Now I know it can be as exciting to go up as go down. Or sideways. Nina says she will return to Colorado for *other* things: ice-skating, ice fishing, a wall ride? Perhaps even to try Reverse Collarbone™ with Günther? Also, I think maybe company name becomes "*Un*limited."

So, *ja*, okay...it is possible to teach old dog new tricks. Change is good.

Mort Gerberg's "Last Laughs" *cartoon collection was published recently by Scribner.*

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: WINTER PARK SLED TEAM ©JIM AUSTIN; SNOWSHOE TRACKS NEAR COLORADO RIVER TRAIL ©WOUTER VAN DER WIEL; ICE CLIMBING ©JOHN LANGSTON; JEEP ICE RACING ©SCOTT KEESEE

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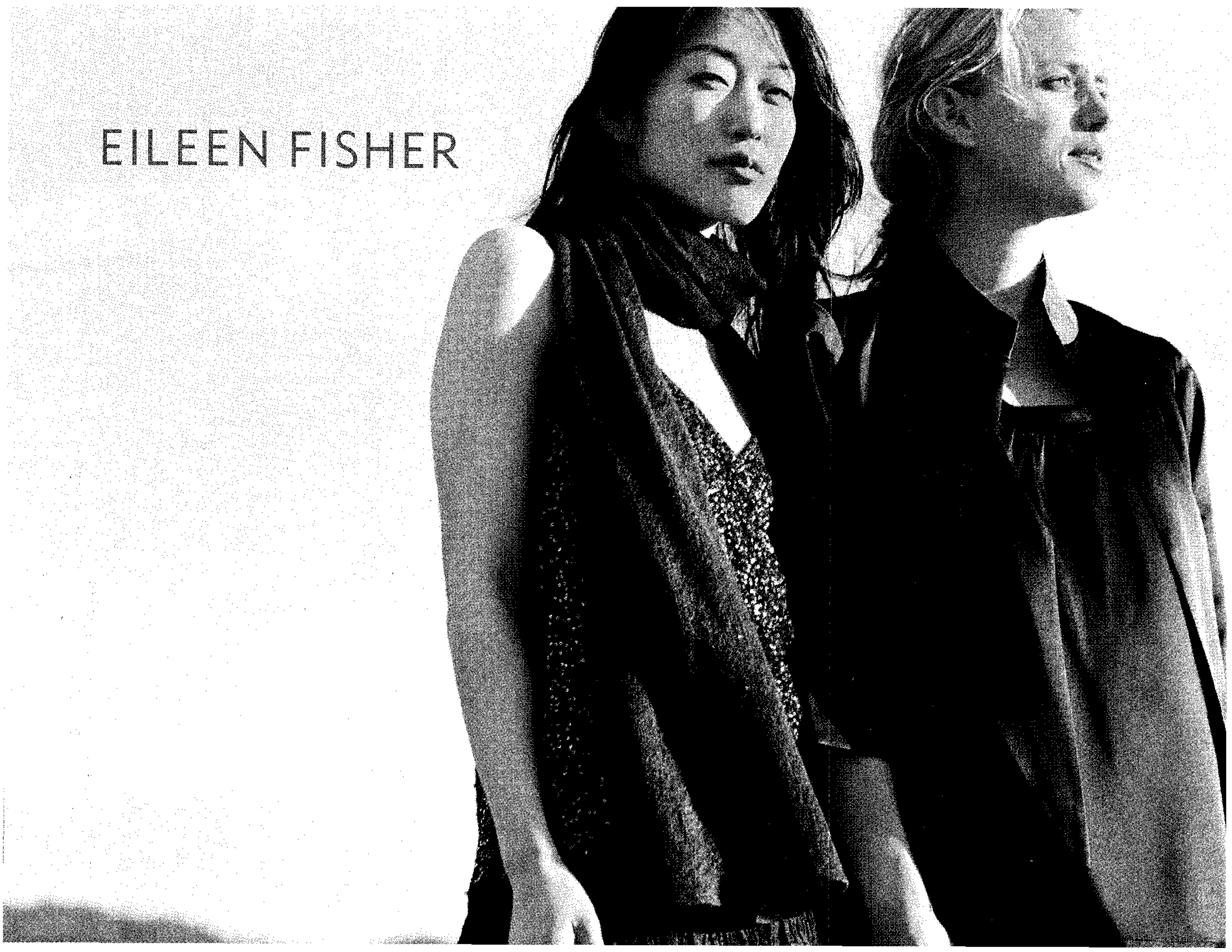
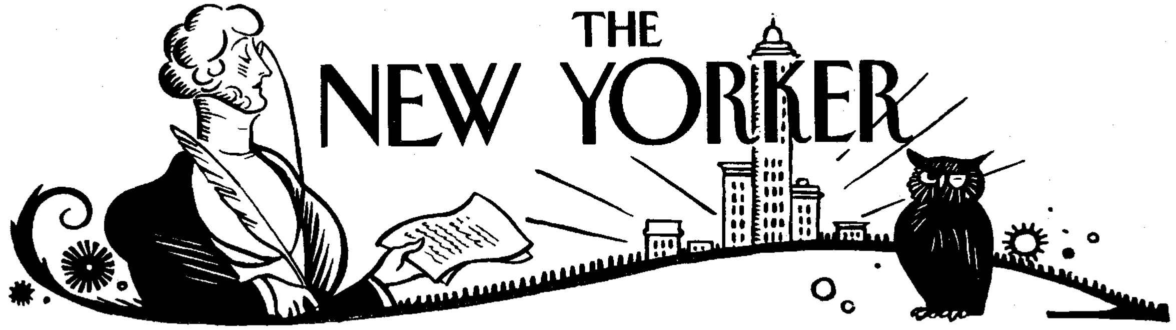

EILEEN FISHER



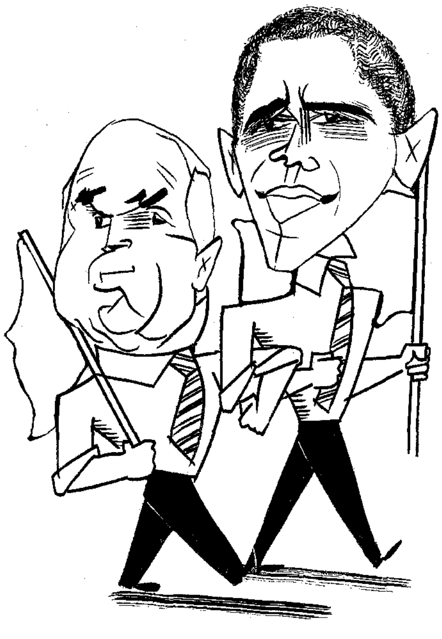
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
LIKE, SOCIALISM

Sometimes, when a political campaign has run out of ideas and senses that the prize is slipping through its fingers, it rolls up a sleeve and plunges an arm, shoulder deep, right down to the bottom of the barrel. The problem for John McCain, Sarah Palin, and the Republican Party is that the bottom was scraped clean long before it dropped out. Back when the polls were nip and tuck and the leaves had not yet begun to turn, Barack Obama had already been accused of betraying the troops, wanting to teach kindergartners all about sex, favoring infanticide, and being a friend of terrorists and terrorism. What was left? The anticlimactic answer came as the long Presidential march of 2008 staggered toward its final week: Senator Obama is a socialist.

"This campaign in the next couple of weeks is about one thing," Todd Akin, a Republican congressman from Missouri, told a McCain rally outside St. Louis. "It's a referendum on socialism." "With all due respect," Senator George Voinovich, Republican of Ohio, said, "the man is a socialist." At an airport rally in Roswell, New Mexico, a well-known landing spot for space aliens, Governor Palin warned against Obama's tax proposals. "Friends," she said, "now is no time to experiment with socialism." And McCain, discussing those proposals, agreed that they sounded "a lot like socialism." There hasn't been so much talk of socialism in an American election since 1920, when Eugene Victor Debs, candidate of the Socialist Party, made his fifth run for President from a cell in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, where he was serving a ten-year sentence for opposing the First World War. (Debs got a million votes and was freed the following year by the new Republican President, Warren G. Harding, who immediately invited him to the White House for a friendly visit.)

As a buzzword, "socialism" had mostly good connotations in most of the world for most of the twentieth century. That's why the Nazis called themselves national socialists. That's why the Bolsheviks called their regime the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, obliging the socialist and social democratic parties of Europe (and America, for what it was worth) to make rescuing the "good name" of socialism one of their central missions. Socialists—one thinks of men like George Orwell, Willy Brandt, and Aneurin Bevan—were among Communism's most passionate and effective enemies.



The United States is a special case. There is a whole shelf of books on the question of why socialism never became a real mass movement here. For decades, the word served mainly as a cudgel with which conservative Republicans beat liberal Democrats about the head. When Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan accused John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson of socialism for advocating guaranteed health care for the aged and the poor, the implication was that Medicare and Medicaid would presage a Soviet America. Now that Communism has been defunct for nearly twenty years, though, the cry of socialism no longer packs its old punch. "At least in Europe, the socialist leaders who so admire my opponent are upfront about their objectives," McCain said the other day—thereby suggesting that the dystopia he abhors is not some North Korean-style totalitarian ant heap but, rather, the gentle social democracies across the Atlantic, where, in return for higher taxes and

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

without any diminution of civil liberty, people buy themselves excellent public education, anxiety-free health care, and decent public transportation.

The Republican argument of the moment seems to be that the difference between capitalism and socialism corresponds to the difference between a top marginal income-tax rate of 35 per cent and a top marginal income-tax rate of 39.6 per cent. The latter is what it would be under Obama's proposal, what it was under President Clinton, and, for that matter, what it will be after 2010 if President Bush's tax cuts expire on schedule. Obama would use some of the added revenue to give a break to pretty much everybody who nets less than a quarter of a million dollars a year. The total tax burden on the private economy would be somewhat lighter than it is now—a bit of elementary Keynesianism that renders doubly untrue the Republican claim that Obama "will raise your taxes."

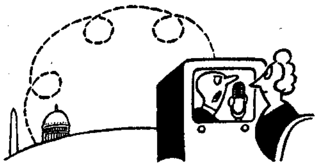
On October 12th, in conversation with a voter forever to be known as Joe the Plumber, Obama gave one of his fullest summaries of his tax plan. After explaining how Joe could benefit from it, whether or not he achieves his dream of owning his own plumbing business, Obama added casually, "I think that when you spread the wealth around, it's good for everybody." McCain and Palin have been quoting this remark ever since, offering it as prima-facie evidence of Obama's unsuitability for office. Of course, all taxes are redistributive, in that they redistribute private resources for public purposes. But the federal income tax is (downwardly) redistributive as a matter of principle: however slightly, it softens the inequalities that are inevitable in a market economy, and it reflects the belief that the wealthy have a proportionately greater stake in the material aspects of the social order and, therefore, should give that order proportionately more material support. McCain himself probably shares this belief, and there was a time when he was willing to say so. During the 2000 campaign, on MSNBC's "Hardball," a young woman asked him why her father, a doctor, should be "penalized" by being "in a huge tax bracket." McCain replied that "wealthy people can afford more" and that "the very wealthy, because they can afford tax lawyers and all kinds of loopholes, really don't pay nearly as much as you think they do." The exchange continued:

> YOUNG WOMAN: Are we getting closer and closer to, like, socialism and stuff?. . .
>
> MCCAIN: Here's what I really believe: That when you reach a certain level of comfort, there's nothing wrong with paying somewhat more.

For her part, Sarah Palin, who has lately taken to calling Obama "Barack the Wealth Spreader," seems to be something of a suspect character herself. She is, at the very least, a fellow-traveller of what might be called socialism with an Alaskan face. The state that she governs has no income or sales tax. Instead, it imposes huge levies on the oil companies that lease its oil fields. The proceeds finance the government's activities and enable it to issue a four-figure annual check to every man, woman, and child in the state. One of the reasons Palin has been a popular governor is that she added an extra twelve hundred dollars to this year's check, bringing the per-person total to $3,269. A few weeks before she was nominated for Vice-President, she told a visiting journalist—Philip Gourevitch, of this magazine—that "we're set up, unlike other states in the union, where it's collectively Alaskans own the resources. So we share in the wealth when the development of these resources occurs." Perhaps there is some meaningful distinction between spreading the wealth and sharing it ("collectively," no less), but finding it would require the analytic skills of Karl the Marxist.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

SIXTY SECONDS
COUCH POTATO POLITICS



Every four years, beginning in 1984, the artists Antoni Muntadas and Marshall Reese have collected political ads from the Presidential election, adding a dozen or so particularly striking new spots to their project, "Political Advertisement." On a recent evening, they met at Goldcrest studios, in the meatpacking district, to work on the seventh edition of the film, which has become what Reese calls "the longest-running video art project in the world." The artists would be screening the film—now a seventy-five-minute compilation of a hundred and two ads, spanning fifty-six years—at the Museum of Modern Art, on October 30th.

Reese, at the keyboard of an Avid editing workstation, called up ads, while Muntadas looked over his shoulder and made comments. They viewed ads featuring telephones—Clinton's 3 A.M. ad, Obama's response, and a McCain phone ad—and discussed which one they should use. Several days of watching political commercials had left them feeling a little dazed. Muntadas seemed somewhat weary, but Reese was animated, almost punchy. Muntadas, who is sixty-six, grew up in Spain under Franco, an experience that sharpened his awareness of the dangers of political propaganda. Reese, fifty-two, watched political ads as a kid in Washington, D.C., and he views the medium with nostalgia, even affection. "One of my first experiences was waiting in line in my elementary school and seeing a classmate with a can of Goldwater ginger ale," he said.

Reese explained that, in making their selections, they hoped both to spotlight innovative ads and to show how certain motifs return again and again. The politician's desk, which Nixon used to considerable effect in 1960, is one such trope; the testimonial, such as Caroline Kennedy's endorsement of Obama, dates to the earliest political ads, like those in the Eisenhower-Stevenson race, in 1952.

This year, in addition to hundreds of ads produced by the campaigns and the national committees, there are ads made by political-action committees and special-interest groups. And there are the straight-to-YouTube videos, like "Obama Girl," and all the mashups and parodies these videos inspired. "The campaign can no longer control its messaging—that's the big change this year," Reese said. "But Obama does well in that environment," he added, calling up the Senator's smiling face. "He's an empty screen, on which people project what they want him to be." Their potential selections included the Phil de Vellis "Vote Different" mashup of Ridley Scott's 1984 Apple ad, with Hillary Clinton as the Big Brother figure on the screen, and the California Nurses As-

Think About It

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The Genesis will take you from zero to 60 in a head-spinning 5.7 seconds[3]—and has more horsepower per liter than a Lexus GS 460.[4] Imagine producing that much power while still getting better mileage than any car in its class.[2]

Impeccable details abound. Example: gaps between body panels are tighter than those found on the standard-bearer for tight tolerances, the Lexus LS 460.[1]

And the Genesis cabin is among the quietest and most spacious available. It's equipped with a Lexicon® 7.1 Discrete surround sound system[5] (shared only with the Rolls-Royce Phantom). And puts you in a driver's seat that is cooled for summertime, heated for winter.

In a luxury car, there's no such thing as getting too comfortable. Although—don't say anything, but some of our competitors may just have found themselves doing that very thing.

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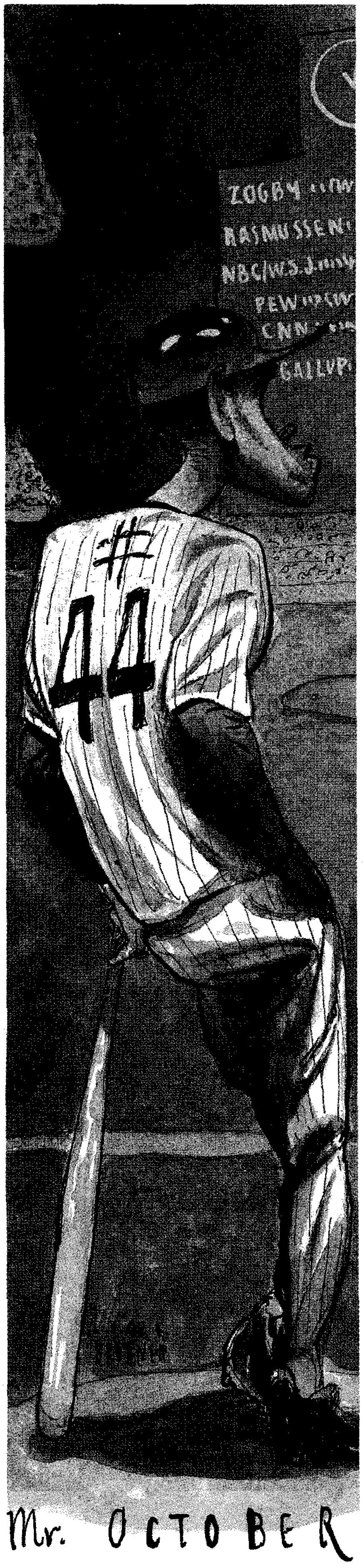


sociation's anti-Palin ad, "One Heartbeat Away," which is a remake of an anti-Dan Quayle ad from 1988.

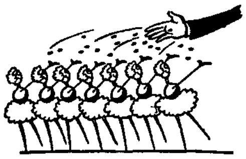
Watching "Political Advertisement" in its entirety is a powerful but disorienting experience. Time hurtles forward with each Presidential election, but there is no clear progress on the fundamental issues. Jobs, better schools, tax relief, help for small businesses, change, peace through strength, and out-of-touch Washington insiders ebb and flow in importance. It's morning again in America in 1984, with the Reagan ads, but soon it's nighttime, with the darkening sky of a 1992 Ross Perot spot on the national debt. Tonally, the film is a perfect hybrid of its creators' sensibilities. It's funny and nostalgic, and has an innocent quality, while at the same time offering a bleak view of a specifically American form of propaganda, born in 1952, that has grown to shape our political process—not just the way we sell our politicians but the nature of the political discourse itself.

The film will close, Reese said, with an excerpt from the music video that Jesse Dylan and Will.i.am made from Obama's "Yes We Can" speech. It points the way toward a new kind of user-made political advertising, in which it is impossible to say where personal expression leaves off and propaganda begins.

"This edit's still going to end 'To Be Continued,' same as every other," Reese said. "We'll be back."

—John Seabrook

DANCE DEPT.
NEWCOMER



Earlier this month, Mikhail Baryshnikov gave a party at his West Side arts center for a Russian citizen who has decided, as he did, thirty-four years ago, to work outside Russia: the choreographer Alexei Ratmansky. Ratmansky is the artistic director of the Bolshoi Ballet, but next year he will be moving to New York, to become the artist-in-residence at American Ballet Theatre. Like many important people who leave Russia, Ratmansky has run into politics on his way out. Moscow's dance community cannot be pleased that this gifted homeboy is moving his operations to the West. Then, there are local politics. In the past two years, Ratmansky has made two popular pieces for New York City Ballet. So when, in February, the *Times* reported that he was talking to Peter Martins, N.Y.C.B.'s artistic director, about becoming the troupe's resident choreographer, no one was surprised. A week later, however, the negotiations came to a halt. According to a City Ballet spokesman, Ratmansky's busy schedule would not allow him to do the job. Then, in September, A.B.T., City Ballet's neighbor and rival, announced that Ratmansky was signing on there instead, in much the same post that he had discussed with N.Y.C.B. Why the switch? "I wouldn't like to go into it," Ratmansky told the *Times*. All this added an interesting chiaroscuro to the Ratmansky picture.

Baryshnikov's party was probably, in some measure, an effort to make everybody happy again. He invited just about every prominent figure in New York's ballet world. Dancers from both N.Y.C.B. and A.B.T. were there, looking sleek and declining hors d'oeuvres. Board members, in their suits, sat at little tables. A.B.T.'s artistic director was present. N.Y.C.B.'s was not. Nevertheless, the crowd was highly interdenominational.

In a toast, Baryshnikov congratulated Peter Martins for "bravely inviting Alexei" to work in New York in the first place. As for hurt feelings in Russia, he mentioned that Ratmansky would be fulfilling assignments there next year. In other words, Ratmansky had not thrown in his lot with any country or company; he was simply a citizen of the global village. "There's a new political reality in this world," Baryshnikov said. "It's wonderful that an artist of Alexei's calibre can travel from one country to another—an opportunity that I didn't have in my prime time." He didn't add that when he terminated his relationship with the Soviet Union he had to run for his life, with the K.G.B. shouting after him, but everyone in the room knew it.

After the toast, the pianist Koji Attwood gave a brief solo concert, ending with his arrangement of "Recuerdos de la Alhambra," written for classical guitar by the Spanish master Francisco Tárrega. This is a beautiful and melancholy piece, and, as Attwood played, New York's western horizon, broadly visible from the windows of the dance studio where the party was being held, seemed to hear it. A great pink sun sank majestically into the river. *Recuerdos* means "memories," and Ratmansky, staring into his wineglass, may have had memories of his own. The world, however interconnected now, is still a collection of different places, and a man can be in only one of them at a time.

But sad moods last only so long. Other Russians besides Baryshnikov were there to greet Ratmansky—for example, Irina Kolpakova, who was Baryshnikov's frequent partner during his years at the Kirov Ballet. In 1974, some Soviet dancers were leaving for a tour of Canada, and they asked the Kirov to allow Baryshnikov and Kolpakova to join them. The company bosses refused to let Baryshnikov go. They considered him a defection risk. But Kolpakova, who was a well-connected person, intervened, and reportedly assured the authorities that she would guarantee his return. So the Kirov let him go, and it was on that tour, in Toronto, that he defected. What Kolpakova told the K.G.B. when she got home nobody knows, but, shortly before the fall of the Soviet Union, she, too, left. One of Baryshnikov's final acts as the director of A.B.T. was to invite her to teach at the company. She has been a ballet mistress there since 1990. At the end of the reception, she was huddled in a corner with Baryshnikov and Ratmansky, the three of them happily speaking Russian, or, rather, speaking ballet, sticking their feet out this way and that. Some people guard their home territory. For others, home is something inside them, and they can take it with them.

—*Joan Acocella*

TAKE A NUMBER
POCKETBOOKS IN THE PARK

New Yorkers love a line. Certain attractions—Shake Shack, Film Forum, Apple stores—even seem to prosper because of the lines leading to them: where there's fire, there's smoke. The latest of these may well turn out to be the Chanel Contemporary Art Container, which opened last week in Central Park—a portable pod (it is here until November 9th, and will travel to six cities in all) designed by Zaha Hadid, and filled with artwork commissioned by Chanel in tribute to the company's 2.55 pocketbook. It was, according to the promotional materials, "a revolutionary event, uniting one of the greatest architects of our time, some of our most innovative artists, and an icon of the fashion world: the quilted bag." In other words: a line generator. Bring headphones, or get a free ticket for timed entry.

Tuesday got off to an anticipatory start when Karl Lagerfeld arrived late at the Museum of Modern Art, where he and Hadid were to give a talk. Trailed by an entourage, Lagerfeld—a line leader if ever there was one—made his way, finally, from the back of the auditorium to a cluster of armchairs onstage.

Lagerfeld told the moderator that he had met Hadid not long ago. "I went up to her in the Mercer and said, 'I love your work.'" He continued, "For me, she is the architect of the twenty-first century, because she liberated us from the ugly Bauhaus that covers the world today."

Lagerfeld seemed enamored of Hadid's contribution to the project, which he had solicited ("through this collaboration, resulting from their singular points of view—poetic, audacious and as yet unseen—the multiple facets of this mythical bag and its universe are revealed," a Chanel release read), but less enthusiastic about its contents, which he had not. "The *pavillon* is the most exciting," he said. "Whatever may be in there—that is not my problem." You could see what he meant. Getting a bunch of artists to fabricate works based on a purse seemed a bit literal, like putting a big plastic pig on the roof of a barbecue joint.

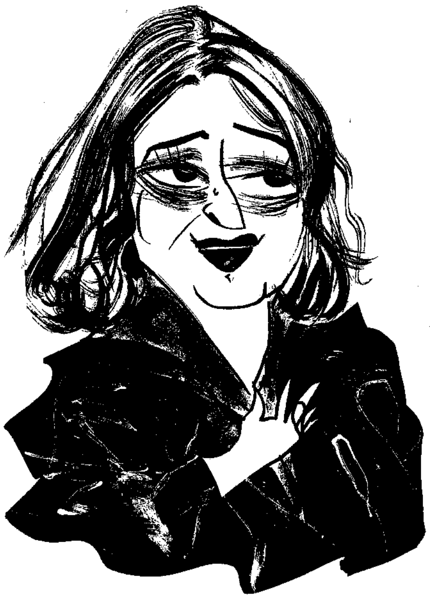
That night, Chanel threw a party to welcome the Container to New York. There it was, a U.F.O. parked for the night, a flying carpet touched down on Rumsey Playfield, amid a canopy of London plane trees. Low-slung and torqued, like a video-game controller, it was weirdly beautiful: stegosaurus spikes; sweeping, dunelike roof; honeycombed skylight. A long line formed, and waiters paced up and down the length of it, proffering mugs of rum-laced hot cider.

"Are you in line?" a woman asked two others who stood toward the front of the crowd. Like many of the partygoers, they were carrying quilted Chanel bags, which was a little like wearing your Sea World T-shirt while you're still in Orlando.

"Line's back there," one of them replied. "Keep goin'."

A few minutes later, the socialite Ann Dexter-Jones approached. "Is this the line to look at the art?" she asked.

"No, this is for the rest room," someone muttered. Ahead, a woman was on her cell phone: "I'd tell you to come up here, but I'm so irritated at all the people who queue-barged in front of me that I just can't do it."



Zaha Hadid

Inside, the socialite Dayssi Olarte de Kanavos, peering into a quilted leather drum upon which the video artist Tabaimo had projected an animated sequence of insect torsos, said, to no one in particular, "So, is this what it feels like to be inside of a Chanel handbag? Fabulous!" Yoko Ono had made the most interesting contribution, a tree onto whose branches each visitor was supposed to tie a rice-paper tag with a wish: "Amour, Paix, Fraternité, Indulgence." "The market has bottomed. Buy 'em!" "Obama should be president." "My dad to be happy at a new job, a family someday, and Chanel bags and shoes for life." Nestled in the crook of a branch hung a tag that read, "Inocente Tequila"—an ad within an ad.

The next day, as dusk fell and visitors milled, Hadid said that she was gratified by the turnout. "You know, it's something to do," she said. "I'm not expecting hedge funders who lost everything to come here, but ordinary people have to have a life."

—*Lauren Collins*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

GREASING THE SLIDE

"Death by a thousand cuts." "Fire-sale liquidation." "A vortex of selling." No matter how people described the market collapse that hit a month ago, the message was the same: it felt like there was nowhere to go but down, and it felt like we'd be going there forever. (Given last week's dip, it still does.) Beginning on September 29th, the U.S. stock market fell on nine of the next ten trading days, plummeting twenty-six per cent; then, after a short, sharp rally, it lost ten per cent more in less than two days. Explanations for the crash often focussed on the hysteria and panic that periodically seem to seize investors. But the madness of crowds wasn't the whole story. In a healthy market, there are countercyclical forces—mechanisms and institutions that go against the general market trend and encourage diversity of thinking—that make it harder for feedback loops and vicious cycles to take hold. Lately, though, many of these institutions and mechanisms have become procyclical: instead of countering trends, they amplify them.

Take, for instance, the credit rating agencies, which investors rely upon for evaluations of companies' creditworthiness and general financial well-being. They are supposed to be a kind of early-warning system for investors, evaluating the health of companies in a way that's insulated from prevailing market trends. Yet many studies have found that rating agencies are more likely to upgrade companies when investors are bullish and downgrade them when investors are bearish. This makes rating changes less useful to investors and also means that they push the market in the direction it's already going. On October 9th, Standard & Poor's announced, late in the day, that it was considering downgrading G.M. That helped an already shaky market fall four per cent in the final hour of trading.

Wall Street analysts have also been good at pouring gasoline on a raging fire. Analysts' ability to take the long view and scrutinize company fundamentals should make them a counterweight whenever investors get too giddy or too gloomy. And sometimes it works that way: last fall, when investors were still relatively optimistic about banks, Oppenheimer's Meredith Whitney correctly forecast serious trouble for the industry. More often, though, we see what the U.C.L.A. finance professor Bradford Cornell calls "positive feedback between stock price movements and analyst recommendations." In other words, analysts often end up following the market, rather than leading it. In the case of a sell-off, this tends to make a bad situation worse. Earlier this month, Goldman Sachs downgraded steel companies like AK Steel. A bold call, you might think, except that it came only after AK Steel's stock had fallen nearly seventy-five per cent in two months.

Rating agencies and Wall Street analysts are always with us. But the most destructive procyclical force in today's market is relatively new—hedge funds. There's an irony here: hedge funds have been touted as a great countercyclical force. Because hedge-fund investors, unlike mutual-fund investors, usually can't pull their money out on a daily basis, the funds were supposed to be able to take a longer-term view and pursue contrarian strategies (like the hedge-fund manager John Paulson's huge bets against the subprime bubble). Because they can follow myriad investment strategies—selling short as well as going long, trading derivatives, and so on—they were supposed to add diversity to the market. And the growing influence of hedge funds did indeed coincide with a decline in market volatility. A study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland showed that hedge funds generally made markets more stable.

Unfortunately, what was true of normal markets has turned out to be irrelevant in a crisis. Hedge-fund investors can't ask for their money back tomorrow, but they commonly can ask for it at the end of any quarter, and after the market's tumble this summer many of them did just that—to the tune of more than forty billion dollars in September alone, according to one estimate. The funds had to raise cash to meet those redemptions, which led them to dump stocks seemingly without regard to price. This colossal liquidation led stocks with a high percentage of hedge-fund ownership to fall, in some cases, forty or fifty per cent in a matter of weeks. The problem was magnified by the fact that the funds inevitably piggyback on one another's trades, which made the selling feed on itself. And the faster funds' positions shrank the more shares they had to sell in order to raise cash. The process was made still more destructive by many hedge funds' reliance on leverage—funds often make bets totalling four or five times their capital. On the way up, leverage is great for maximizing returns. On the way down, it's great at maximizing pain.

The great paradox of the sell-off, then, is that the factors that were supposed to increase the flow of information to investors, foster long-term thinking, and encourage contrarian positions did exactly the opposite. If there's a silver lining in all this, it's that investors who can endure past the present moment now have the chance to buy what at least look like very cheap stocks. Still, it's not surprising that investors have been unwilling to step up. It's hard enough to catch a falling knife. But it's nearly impossible when hedge funds are hurling it.

—*James Surowiecki*

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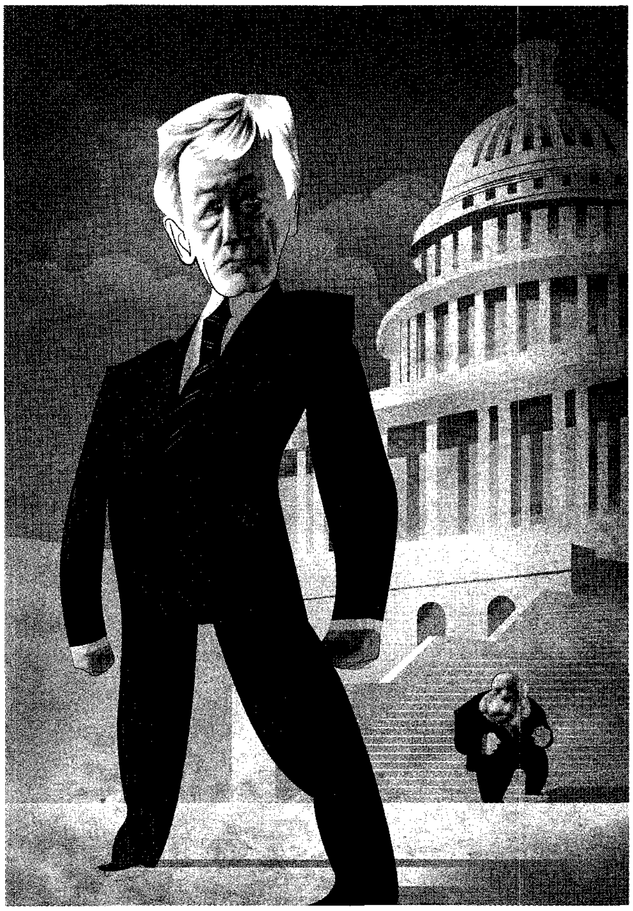
THE POLITICAL SCENE

ODD MAN OUT

Chuck Hagel's Republican exile.

BY CONNIE BRUCK

In early June, Senators Chuck Hagel and John McCain met in Hagel's office on Capitol Hill. McCain, the presumptive Republican Presidential nominee, considered Hagel—a fellow-Republican and the senior senator from Nebraska—among his closest friends in Congress. Six months earlier, in December, 2007, McCain's campaign manager, Rick Davis, had asked Hagel to endorse McCain and campaign with him in the upcoming primaries. Hagel had demurred. Even after McCain became the presumptive nominee, in March, Hagel, asked repeatedly on the Sunday-morning talk shows whether he was going to endorse him, remained noncommittal.



Could Hagel have a role in an Obama Administration?

ANDRÉ CARRILHO

In Washington, the men's friendship was well known, and unsurprising. Both were hard-driving, politically conservative, hot-tempered, and humorous. They had served in Vietnam and were known as independent thinkers, averse to Party orthodoxy. And although they could be self-deprecating, they had a penchant for righteousness that did not endear them to many colleagues. McCain had campaigned in Nebraska for Hagel in 1996, during Hagel's first Senate race, which he won in an upset against Ben Nelson, the former Nebraska governor (and current Democratic senator). A photograph in Hagel's office shows him newly elected, with the five other senators who were Vietnam veterans: McCain, Bob Kerrey, Chuck Robb, John Kerry, and Max Cleland, who lost both legs and an arm in the war. Cleland, seated in a wheelchair, has made a joke, which they all seem to be enjoying. But Hagel and McCain didn't become close until, about a year and a half later, McCain read a story about Hagel and the Nebraska gubernatorial race in *Roll Call,* the Capitol Hill newspaper. As the article recounted, Jon Christensen, the onetime front-runner in the 1998 Republican primary, had attacked his opponent with a harsh negative mailer in the final days before the election. Hagel and other Party officials in Nebraska, who had said that they would remain neutral, scolded Christensen and declared that his tactics "embarrassed Nebraska." Christensen lost by a large margin. The story quoted Hagel as saying, "The most dangerous element of our political future in this country is candidates who debase and degrade the political process by straight-out lies and misleading spots on television. It's a cancer to our system." Hagel told me that McCain came to his office to talk to him about the article and said, "You know, I'm really proud of you for doing that. Not many people would have done it."

In 2000, when McCain first ran for President, Hagel was one of only four senators who endorsed him, and he became co-chair of the McCain campaign. McCain lost in the South Carolina primary after evangelicals led by Pat Robertson and Ralph Reed rallied the Christian right to George W. Bush. A smear campaign in the state suggested that McCain had fathered Bridget, the Bangladeshi orphan he and his wife, Cindy, adopted in 1993. Hagel declared that Bush had "sold his soul to the right wing" and called Bush's campaign "the filthiest" he had ever seen. McCain was invited to speak at the 2000 Republican National Convention, and Hagel was allotted three minutes for the introduction. Moments before he was to walk onstage, a member of Bush's team told him that he would have only ninety seconds. Hagel excoriated the man with a ferocity that McCain would have appreciated—and he delivered his three-minute speech.

After September 11, 2001, differences in Hagel's and McCain's views on foreign policy became sharper, and more consequential. Hagel, a member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, is an ardent internationalist—"All of us are touched by every event that unfolds in every corner of the world," he often says. An advocate for a strong military, he also believes that military force should be the last tool of statecraft. McCain has an almost religious belief in American exceptionalism and the merits of using military force to protect the nation's interests and promote its values. ("Whatever sacrifices you must bear," he told young men and women at the U.S. Naval Academy, in October, 2001, "you will know a happiness far more sublime than pleasure.") In the months after the September 11th attacks, he became an enthusiastic promoter of war in Iraq. In early January, 2002, as warplanes took off for Afghanistan, McCain stood on the flight bridge of the U.S.S. Theodore Roosevelt, an aircraft carrier in the Arabian Sea, and yelled, "Next up, Baghdad!" Hagel, who was on the trip with the same congressional delegation, told a reporter, "I think it would be wrong, very shortsighted, and very dangerous for the United States to unilaterally move on Iraq."

Despite misgivings about the Bush Administration's buildup to war—misgivings that Hagel aired repeatedly in public—he voted for the October, 2002, war resolution. (He has since said that he regrets his vote.) On the Senate floor, he declared, "Actions in Iraq must come in the context of an American-led, multilateral approach to disarmament, not as the first case for a new American doctrine involving the preëmptive use of force." He also expressed fear about what he calls "the uncontrollables"—the unpredictable consequences of military action—and about America's limited knowledge of the Middle East. "How many of us really know and understand Iraq, the country, the history, the people, and the role in the Arab world?" he asked. "The American people must be told of this long-term commitment, risk, and cost of this undertaking. We should not be seduced by the expectations of dancing in the streets." In September, 2004, he called the situation in Iraq "beyond pitiful." Senator John Kerry, in a debate with President Bush in the 2004 campaign, quoted Hagel's comment, which rankled Hagel's Republican colleagues. Hagel has frequently described the Administration's "war on terror" as ill-conceived sloganeering and has argued that, in addition to fighting terrorism, we must fight the poverty and despair that enable terrorism to flourish. In a committee hearing in early 2007, he denounced the Bush Administration's proposed "surge" strategy, which McCain strongly supported, as "the most dangerous foreign-policy blunder in this country since Vietnam."

Nevertheless, he and McCain have remained friends, Hagel told me in a series of interviews over the past several months. "That's the problem with Washington, quite frankly—if you disagree with somebody, you should dislike them, too," said Hagel, who is sixty-two and has white hair, a worn, ruggedly handsome face, and a forthright manner. "It's hard, it seems, for some people to comprehend how John and I can be on such different paths on something so important, and still fundamentally have a relationship that's pretty deep." (McCain's campaign declined to comment for this article.)

McCain no doubt understood how difficult it would be for Hagel to endorse him, yet their differences were what would make the endorsement so valuable. From 2004 on, McCain, in his desire to win the nomination, had embraced Bush's policies ever more zealously, while Hagel had become the Administration's most severe Republican critic. Although he has frequently voted with his party on domestic policy, his views on foreign policy represent a bold departure from those of the Administration, and his willingness to take Bush to task publicly has alienated many Republicans. In some ways, Hagel is far more of a maverick than McCain has ever been, and his endorsement would likely sway independents whose votes McCain probably needs in order to win.

Hagel said of their meeting in June, "It never was an interview kind of thing—'John, let me get these things straight.' " Rather, he explained, "I wanted to understand, too, as we talked through these things, where he was going. . . . We talked about Iraq, and he and I disagree on this." They also discussed McCain's argument that Senator Barack Obama, the Democratic Presidential nominee, was wrong to pursue direct engagement with Iranian leaders. "And I said, 'I don't think he is. It's what I've been saying, actually longer than Obama.' I remember telling John—I said, 'John, if you don't engage Iran, where do you think this is going to go? We're going to be in another war!' " (Hagel has been calling for direct, unconditional talks with Iran since 2001.)

Hagel says that he told McCain that he believed the election would be close, and he warned against waging a vicious campaign of the kind that had defeated McCain in 2000. "Once you win, then you're going to have to govern," Hagel told his friend. "The Democrats are going to add to their numbers, probably significantly, in the House and the Senate. You're going to be faced with a strong Democratic Congress. You are going to have to bring some consensus here, and the first thing you are going to have to do is reach out to the Congress—Democrat and Republican."

After the meeting, which Hagel says

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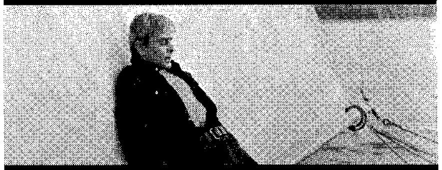

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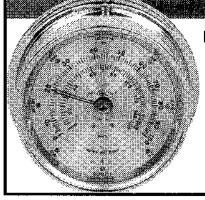

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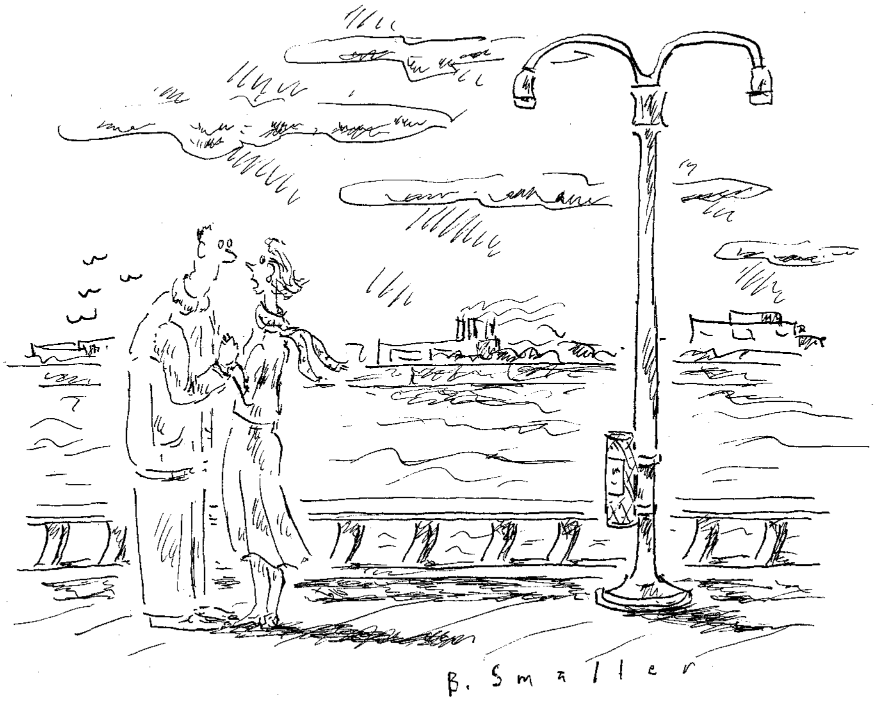

"I want someone I can grow old and have plastic surgery with."

• •

was amicable, any possibility that he might endorse McCain seemed to disappear. In response to interviewers' questions, Hagel began to say that he would consider serving as Obama's Vice-Presidential candidate—though he often added that he did not believe he would be asked—or in an Obama Cabinet; he's often mentioned in the press as a possible Secretary of State or Secretary of Defense. In mid-July, Hagel and his friend Senator Jack Reed, a Democrat from Rhode Island, accompanied Obama on a trip to Afghanistan and Iraq. Describing Baghdad to me after he returned, Hagel said, "You can't walk around—you've got flak jackets, helmets on all the time, no matter where you are. It's always struck me it's almost like a Fellini movie, kind of unreal. The American people are told things are stable and secure and violence is down. No American would walk outside there without a convoy!"

Hagel's unwillingness to endorse McCain is generally perceived to be a result of their ongoing disagreements over the Iraq war. But he told me that the gulf between them is much deeper: "In good conscience, I could not enthusiastically—honestly—go out and endorse him and support him when we so fundamentally disagree on the future course of our foreign policy and our role in the world."

Like Obama, Hagel—who is not running for reëlection this year—seems to have viewed the Senate more as a stepping stone than as a final destination. As a freshman, he secured a seat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and became a serious student of foreign policy, treating committee hearings as seminars. After the November, 1998, elections, in which the Republicans failed to gain a single Senate seat, he challenged Senator Mitch McConnell for the chairmanship of the Republican Campaign Committee. He attacked the G.O.P. leadership for running "issueless campaigns" with "demonizing" ads, and he spoke about the need to renew the "political culture in America by 'defining up' the standards of debate, political discourse, and campaigns." (Hagel lost.) In 2000, he was on the short list of Vice-Presidential candidates compiled by Dick Cheney for Bush. Four years later, Hagel, with a small group of advisers, was discussing running for President in 2008.

From the start, securing the Republican nomination loomed as his greatest challenge. A traditional pro-business, small-government conservative, Hagel is a graduate of a Catholic high school, who is pro-life and supports school prayer. He occasionally broke with his party—on immigration reform, on the No Child Left Behind Act, on a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage—but, according to *Congressional Quarterly*, in 2006 he voted with the President ninety-six per cent of the time.

Hagel's heresy on the Iraq war overshadowed the rest of his record, however. In 2002, the *Weekly Standard* included Hagel (along with Brent Scowcroft and the *Times*) in its "axis of appeasement." After Democrats won control of Congress in 2006 and allowed many more votes on the war, Hagel's support for Bush's policies declined—in 2007, he voted with the President just seventy-two per cent of the time—and some commentators referred to him as "not a real Republican."

Hagel says that he attempted to offer advice privately to the White House but was rebuffed. He once called Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and asked to see him; Rumsfeld invited him to lunch. "I wanted to talk to him alone," Hagel said. "And when I showed up he had a whole table full of generals and admirals." During the Clinton Administration, he began writing letters to the President on foreign-policy issues of signal importance. "Clinton used to call me and we'd discuss it, or he'd ask me to come talk with him," Hagel recalled. In the past eight years, he has written to Bush a number of times, including, most recently, letters about Russia and Iran. But he said that he has never received a response from the President. (He has occasionally received an acknowledgment from the assistant secretary for legislative affairs.)

"This Administration has viewed Congress as an appendage, a nuisance," Hagel told me. "Clinton was just the opposite. Reagan was the opposite. Bush's father was the opposite. They understood the value of making Congress their ally." He said that Vice-President Cheney nearly always attended the weekly lunch held by the Senate Republican Caucus, at which major issues—including the war in Iraq—are discussed. Often, someone asked Cheney whether he'd like to say something. "Almost always, he'd say, 'No, no,'" Hagel said. "It always said to me, by his very lack of engagement or even giv-

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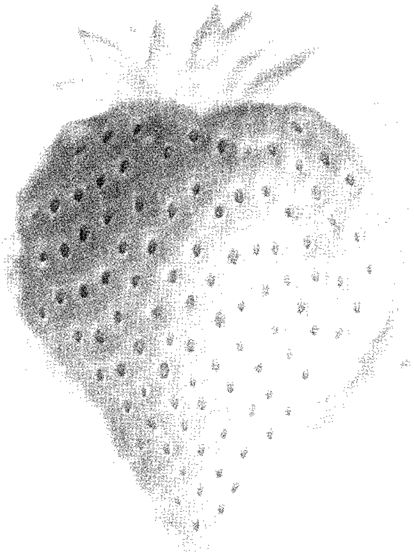

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ing us the courtesy of saying something, that they could care less about us. Except when he wanted us to do something: 'Vote this way.' "

In December, 2006, the Iraq Study Group released its report about the war, describing the situation in Iraq as a quagmire. Hagel heartily agreed with the group's key recommendations—a phased troop withdrawal and diplomatic engagement with Iran and Syria—and he was taken aback by the Bush Administration's negative reaction. "It was a way for the President to almost start over, in building a bipartisan consensus," he said. "And as I watched this thing go forward—the essential trashing of the report by the President, in his remarks—I was astounded. Not much astounded me about this crowd anymore. But this did."

Instead of withdrawing troops, the Bush Administration decided to increase their number by thirty thousand, a strategy that became known as the surge. On January 24, 2007, Hagel addressed his colleagues on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He and his close friend Joe Biden, the Democratic senator who is the committee's chairman (and now the Democratic Vice-Presidential nominee), sponsored a resolution opposing the escalation and calling for a transition to a limited U.S. military mission in Iraq. "This is not a defeatist resolution," Hagel told members of the committee. "We're not talking about cutting off funds, not supporting the troops. . . . When I hear, on both sides of this argument, impugning motives and patriotism to our country, not only is it offensive and disgusting but it debases the whole system of our country and who we are." He went on, "We didn't involve the Congress in this when we should have. And I'm to blame. Every senator who's been here the last four years has to take some responsibility for that. But I will not sit here in this Congress of the United States, at this important time for our country and in the world, and not have something to say about this. And maybe I'll be wrong. . . . But I don't ever want to look back and have the regret that I didn't have the courage and I didn't do what I could."

Recalling that morning, Hagel said that, as he listened to his colleagues discuss sending more troops to Iraq, he was struck by their "cavalier approach, as if it were an abstraction. Very few people know much about war, very few are touched by it. This is also a time when we had seen over a period of four years so much deception by this Administration—straight outright lies—and I thought to myself, as I looked around the committee, have we learned nothing in the last four years? And we're now going to send thirty thousand more troops into this meat grinder? For what? . . . We were not a co-equal branch of government. We were just kind of this afterthought to the President, and whatever he tells us to do, we kind of docilely go along."

The committee approved the resolution in a 12–9 vote; Hagel was the only Republican who voted for it. "I was called a 'traitor,' and I was called 'disgusting,'" he told me. "How could I not support the troops? 'Shut your mouth, you're a Republican!' Which I always found astounding—to equate war based on your politics, as a Democrat or a Republican. I often said in hearings, I wonder where my Republican colleagues, who are so enthusiastic about the war in Iraq, would be if Bill Clinton was the President? I think I know exactly where they would be." Several days after the vote, Cheney, in an interview with *Newsweek*, said that he believed "in Ronald Reagan's 11th commandment: thou shalt not speak ill of a fellow Republican. But it's very hard sometimes to adhere to that where Chuck Hagel is involved."

For the next several months, Hagel tried to persuade enough Republicans to vote for a similar Democratic amendment, so that Republicans and Democrats together would reach sixty votes—the number required to prevent a filibuster. Various Republican colleagues told him privately that they agreed with him, he said, but he was unable to win more than a handful of Republican votes.

On Wednesday, March 7, 2007, Hagel's staff sent reporters e-mails announcing a press conference at the University of Nebraska, in Omaha, the following Monday. Most reporters assumed that Hagel was planning to declare his intention to run for President; NPR reported that "the Senator's campaign is portraying tomorrow's announcement as one of the most important in his career." But Hagel told the crowd that he had not yet made up his mind, and he was widely ridiculed. That month, in an interview with *Esquire*, Hagel said of Bush, "He's not accountable anymore, which isn't totally true. You can impeach him, and before this is over, you might see calls for his impeachment." John McCollister, a former Nebraska congressman and a longtime friend of Hagel's, wrote a letter to the editor of the Omaha *World Herald*, criticizing him, though not by name. "I believe that some people disregard the awful consequences of a premature withdrawal and want to end the war, period," McCollister wrote. "Others have a consuming, burning hatred of George W. Bush as their dominant legislative priority. Those who carelessly throw out talk of 'impeachment' are of the same stripe." Michael McCarthy, the chairman of a private-equity firm in Omaha where Hagel worked in the early nineties, and who was one of his closest advisers as he considered running for President, told me that Hagel is "very good at political calculus, so there is no doubt that he understood the political ramifications of anything he said, or actions he took." Even so, McCarthy added, as Hagel has become frustrated by Congress's failure to confront the Bush Administration over its conduct of the Iraq war, "he has become—he'll hate me for saying this—somewhat more preachy."

Some observers were perplexed by Hagel's behavior; if he was serious about running for President, why was he doing and saying things that virtually guaranteed he could not win the nomination? But Rita E. Hauser, a longtime Republican activist who served on Bush's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board during his first term, and had numerous conversations with Hagel as he thought about entering the race, told me that she encouraged him. "It was a long shot, but I felt he could run as a courageous dissenter, and there was plenty of interest in that among a wide swath of Republicans, who felt the war had gone terribly awry." Hauser said that Hagel was concerned about the growing political power of the religious right. "He was somewhat shocked at the degree to which the pro-life people—I'll call it the extreme Christian agenda—had taken over the Party." In the end, Hauser said, Hagel concluded that if he had to take on both the Christian right and the Bush White House he probably could not win the nomination. In September, 2007, Hagel announced that he would not run for President in 2008 and would retire from the Senate at the end of his term.

According to several people close to Hagel, he had become increasingly discouraged by his inability to influence the Bush Administration and his Republican colleagues, particularly on Iraq-war policy. His younger brother Tom, a law professor at the University of Dayton, says that Hagel, in his various occupations before he became a senator, "had his own agenda and could get things done. I think it was incredibly frustrating for him to be in the Senate, as one of one hundred senators." When I asked Hagel about his decision to retire, he pointed out that after he was elected he said that he only intended to serve for two terms. On Election Night, he went on, his wife, Lilibet, had asked him, "Do you think you can hold a job for six years?"

"That's true!" Lilibet told me in late July. We were seated at the kitchen table in the Hagels' large flagstone house, set high on a hill in McLean, Virginia, where they live with their two teen-age children and a Portuguese water dog. Lilibet, a dark-haired, dark-eyed woman from Meridian, Mississippi, who volunteers as a reading tutor in inner-city Washington schools, explained that until Hagel became a senator he had never stayed in a job for more than a few years. "I think he just likes change—it keeps things interesting." It appears to be a pattern set in his childhood. "His father changed jobs a lot—from bad to worse—and they were always moving," Lilibet said. "Chuck liked going to new schools—a chance to make new friends and, I think, reinvent himself."

Hagel, the eldest of four boys, grew up in small towns in the Sand Hills of Nebraska, where acres of arid land stretch to the horizon. (One town where the Hagels lived, Ainsworth, calls itself "The Middle of Nowhere.") Early on, Hagel developed a curiosity about the world; he loved history, and historical biographies in particular. The family was very poor. The summer he was nine, he held jobs sacking potatoes and ice. When he was eleven, he worked as a carhop at a local drive-in res-

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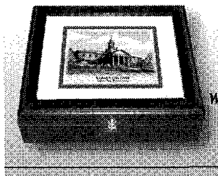

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taurant at night. (He had to stand on a carton to hand trays through car windows.) His father, a veteran of the Second World War, was enormously proud of his oldest boy, but he also drank a great deal and sometimes became abusive. By the time Chuck was eight or nine, he was interposing himself between his father and his mother, or his father and his brothers. When Chuck was sixteen, his father died suddenly, on Christmas morning, and Chuck helped his mother support the family. "So much of who you are starts young," Hagel told me. "My dad brought a lot of his problems on himself, but I saw how people took advantage of him. And I saw how my mother had to suffer through that. I watched all this. And I guess that's what has driven me in some ways to be more cause-oriented than a lot of people, to try to go back and see, what's the cause of this? Let's don't just treat the symptoms. When I talk about a man without dignity or without hope, that all comes from down inside me, a long, long time ago."

In 1967, when Hagel was twenty-one, he and his brother Tom received draft notices and volunteered to go to Vietnam. Eventually, they were assigned to the same unit, and they served together for ten months in the jungles of the Mekong Delta. In "America: Our Next Chapter," a book he published earlier this year, Hagel describes how Tom saved his life, staunching the blood after shrapnel pierced his chest. A few weeks later, he saved Tom's life, after their armored personnel carrier hit a land mine. Chuck, his own body aflame, dragged his unconscious brother from the vehicle just before it exploded. Chuck received two Purple Hearts; Tom received three, and a Bronze Star.

For nearly three decades, Chuck and Tom argued about the war, Tom maintaining that it was unjustified from the start and Chuck that it was a righteous effort gone wrong. Then Chuck listened to newly released tapes in which President Lyndon B. Johnson confessed that he knew he couldn't win in Vietnam but wouldn't pull out because he didn't want to be remembered for losing a war. That ended the brothers' fight. "Chuck is a Type A personality, and he used to be, quite frankly, incredibly rigid," Tom told me. "But he's become more willing to listen to contrary opinions."

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Hagel met Lilibet in 1982, when she was completing a master's degree in literature and working on Capitol Hill as a staffer for G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery, a congressman from Mississippi. By that time, Hagel was thirty-six; he had been briefly married, had worked his way through the University of Nebraska, and had held jobs as a radio newscaster, a lobbyist, and an administrative assistant to Representative McCollister. In 1981, he had joined the Veterans' Administration as the deputy administrator. The head of the V.A. was Robert Nimmo, a former California legislator and friend of President Ronald Reagan. "Nimmo had next to no interest in veterans' issues," Lilibet said. "Chuck went to the White House and said to Ed Meese"—then counsellor to Reagan—"'Either Bob Nimmo goes or I go.' Our friends said, 'Who are you?' But Chuck said, as I've heard so many times since then, 'But it's just wrong!' " Hagel resigned, and the Los Angeles *Times* published an editorial about Nimmo titled "The Wrong Man Is Leaving."

Hagel entered the nascent cell-phone business. "People say politics is so hard, but nothing could be as hard as that was—and there was no assurance it would work," Lilibet recalled. The Federal Communications Commission was awarding two free licenses in each market for the operation of cell-phone systems. Hagel and several partners raised money from hundreds of investors, telling them that they were buying the chance to compete for the licenses through comparative trials, which would be adjudicated by the F.C.C. Then the F.C.C. changed the process to a lottery. Many of the investors were furious and wanted their money back. "We thought we were going to be sued from here to the end of the earth," Richardson Preyer, Jr., one of Hagel's partners, told me. But they devised an aggressive strategy, in which their company, Vanguard Cellular, negotiated advance agreements with other applicants for each license, thus increasing Vanguard's odds of winning. When the company went public, in 1988, Hagel and his partners made millions.

Steve Leeolou, another partner, credited Hagel for the company's survival. "The more difficult and seemingly senseless circumstances become, the better he

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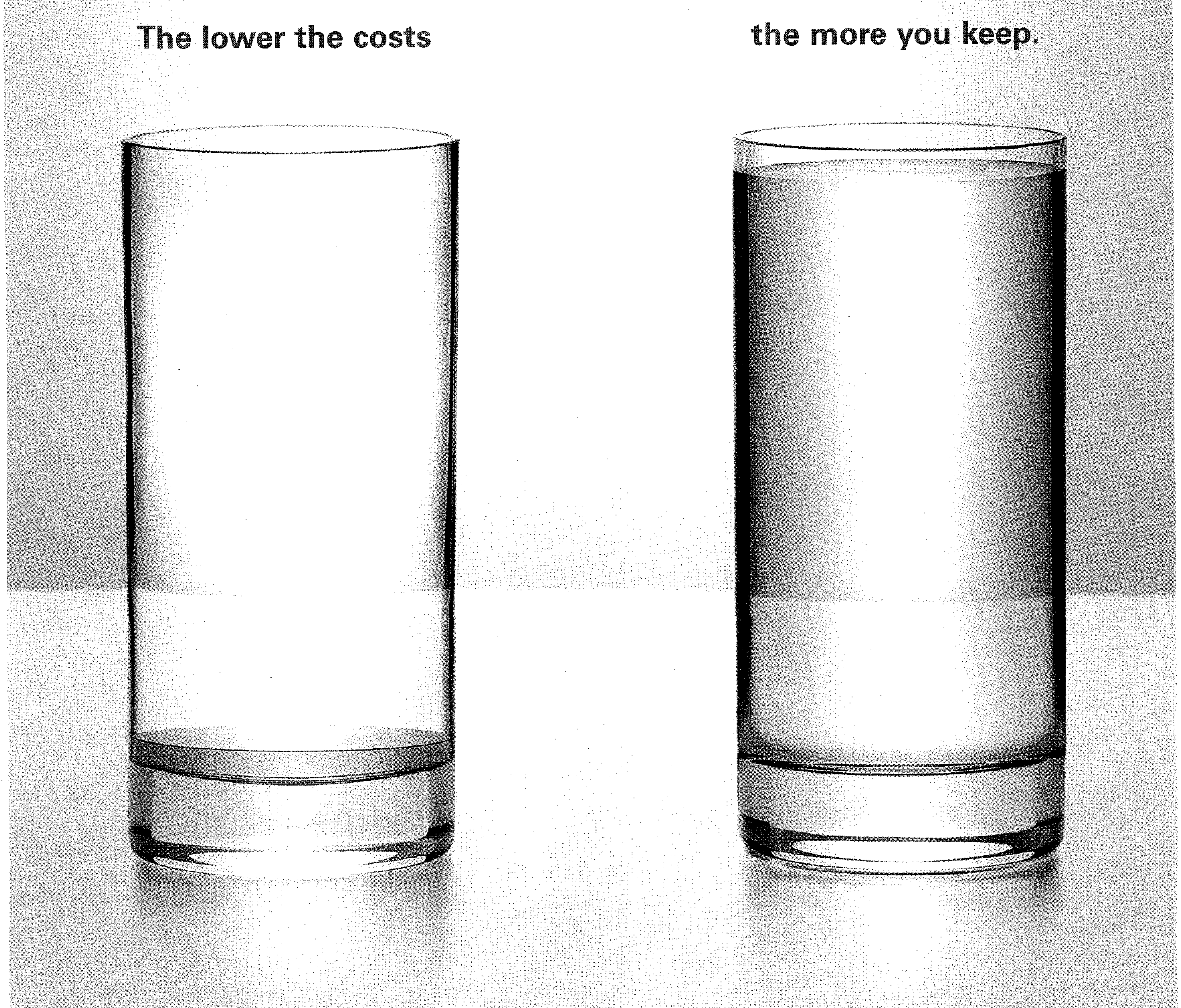

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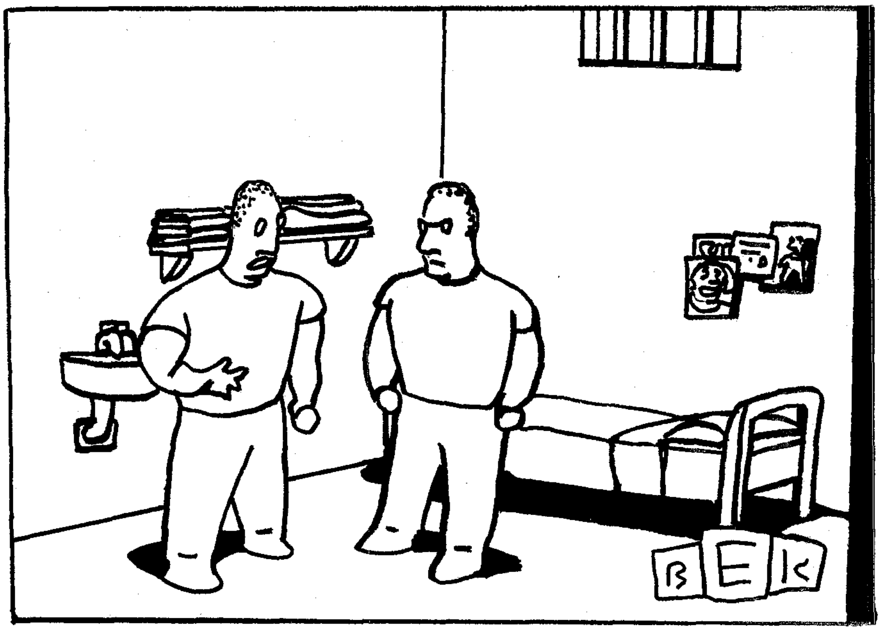


"Is it rude to skip the riot and just show up for the escape attempt?"

does," Leeolou said. He added that Hagel has little patience with situations he cannot control. "In almost every chapter of Chuck's life, there is this theme of sticking to principles, almost to a fault. He's been willing to sacrifice friendships, business partners, women along the way that he dated. If he feels that a relationship threatens his principles, or his sense of what's right, or something that needs to be done, he will cut that relationship off, fairly cleanly, and move on."

Hagel had resigned from Vanguard in 1987 and for three years was head of the nonprofit organization World U.S.O. In 1992, he and his family moved to Nebraska, where he went to work as an investment banker in Michael McCarthy's firm—and prepared to run for office.

Lilibet mentioned that Hagel had just returned from his trip with Obama and Reed to Iraq and Afghanistan. "He came back from that trip in a better mood than he did from most other CODELs [congressional delegation trips]," she said. "It was so great for him to be with two guys who appreciate him, listen to him." As for Hagel's Republican colleagues, she added, "his position in that caucus has been a little like a skunk at a garden party." I asked her about Cheney's criticism of Hagel in *Newsweek*, and she replied, "That's O.K. We don't breathe the same air as Cheney or Rove. We cancel social engagements if we look at the list and see that they're on it."

Lilibet, who contributed to the Obama campaign last February, formally endorsed him on October 7th, at a rally of G.O.P. women for Obama in Alexandria, Virginia. In her speech, she referred to the McCain campaign, deploring the "phantom issues, churned out by a topnotch slander machine," and said, "I believe the character of the campaign says much about the character of the candidate." She was Michelle Obama's guest at the final Presidential debate, on October 15th.

On the morning of September 17th, five weeks after the former Soviet republic of Georgia attacked the separatist Georgian province of South Ossetia, and the Russian Army invaded Georgia, William J. Burns, the State Department's Under-Secretary for Political Affairs, testified before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. Hagel asked Burns what was being done to repair America's relationship with Russia, and said, "We're going to have to find some new common ground and new high ground to deal with Russia," taking into account the Russians' "interest, as perceived by them, not just perceived by us, but their optics." Hagel was invoking, as he often does, the need to see through an antagonist's eyes. He asked Burns whether President Bush and President Dmitri Medvedev, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, were talking on a regular basis and what new initiatives were being discussed.

Burns responded by citing initiatives that had existed before the Russian advance into Georgia.

"In all due respect, Mr. Secretary, I understand all that, you've covered that ground," Hagel went on. "Let me go back to my question. Are we doing anything new, anything fresh, taking the reality that we have before us? . . . Has the President talked to President Medvedev very often?"

Burns said that Rice had spoken with Lavrov that week and that he was unaware of any recent conversation between Bush and Medvedev.

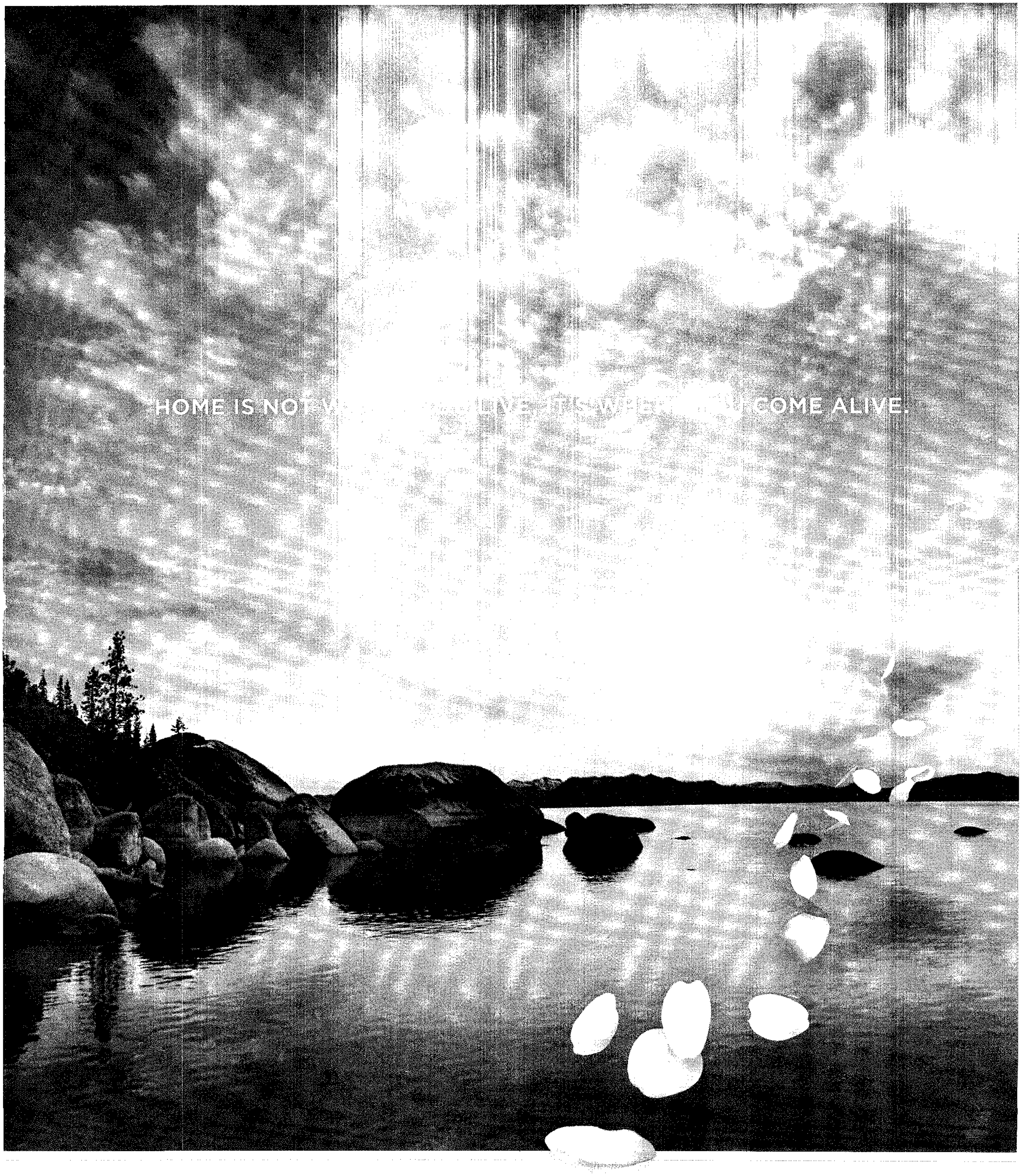
"The President has not spoken with President Medvedev since the Russian incursion into Georgia?" Hagel asked, incredulous.

Burns said that he would check.

According to the State Department, Bush had spoken with Medvedev the day after the incursion, but not since. "I just don't think that that's a smart way to handle this," Hagel told me. "We've got to be very careful that we don't misplay all this and unwind some of the progress we've made and go back, intentionally or unintentionally, to another form of a Cold War.

"We're going to have differences, of course," he went on. "But you have to look at where the common interests are." He listed the global challenges for which Russian coöperation is vital: proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, energy, terrorism, the environment, Iran, North Korea, Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "Across the board, Russia is woven into this fabric," he said. "That's the reality."

Last January, Hagel travelled to Russia and met with more than a dozen Russian officials. (Vladimir Putin and Medvedev, whom Hagel knows from earlier visits, were travelling abroad.) Nearly all of them raised objections to recent American proposals and objectives, including NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine, missile-defense systems in the Czech Republic and Poland, and independence for Kosovo. "They made it very clear that if we continued to unilaterally push on these things without at least giving them some opportunity to respond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and work through these issues, then there would be a consequence," Hagel said. "When I came back, I called Bob Gates"—the Secretary of Defense—"and had a long private conversation with him and passed on to him what I heard." He went on, "This disproportionate Russian response to the Georgians attacking South Ossetia . . . should not have come as any surprise to us." Hagel added that he had been to Georgia many times and knows President Mikheil Saakashvili well. "I think Saakashvili made a very, very disastrous miscalculation that somehow we would be there."

McCain has been a passionate supporter of Saakashvili and has encouraged Georgia's efforts to join NATO, as part of a strategy to contain Russia. (According to the *Times*, for at least four years, until last March, McCain's top foreign-policy adviser, Randy Scheunemann, was a lobbyist for Georgia.) American officials have repeatedly stated that the U.S. missile-defense systems intended for the Czech Republic and Poland are to be used against possible missile attacks from Iran. But, even before the Russian incursion into Georgia, McCain described the missile-defense systems as "a hedge against potential threats from possible strategic competitors, like Russia and China." The day the ceasefire between Russia and Georgia was declared, the McCain campaign issued a press release stating that McCain had told Saakashvili, "Today we are all Georgians." Referring to McCain's statement, Hagel said, "That's an interesting thing to say, but I'm not sure what John means by that. Is he willing to put F-16s in the air and attack the Russians?"

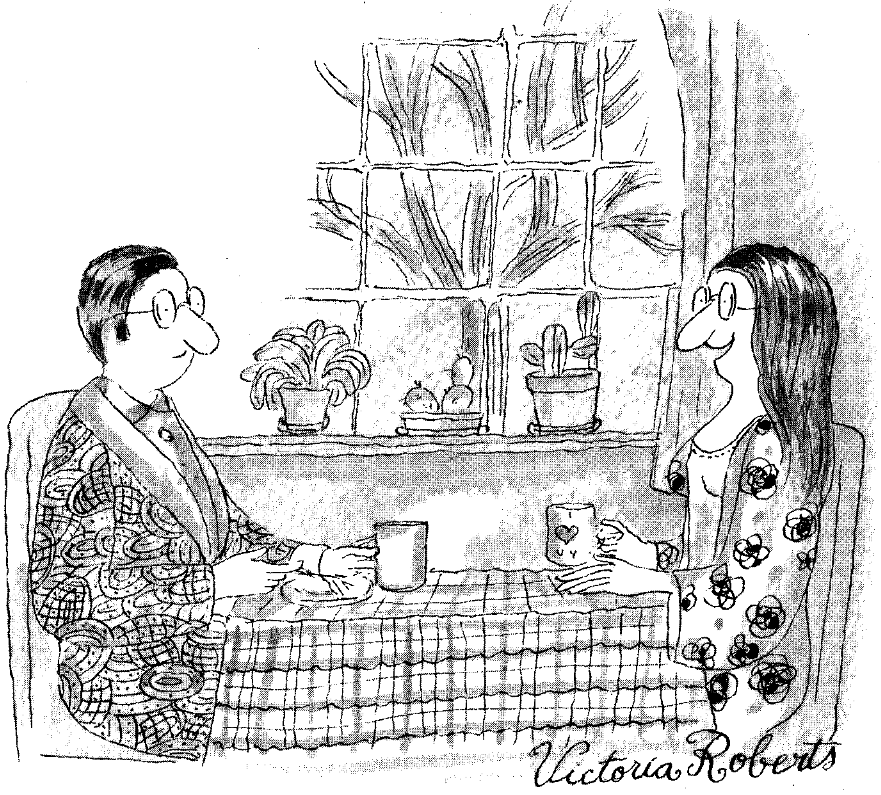
Hagel, citing McCain's repeated calls for Russia to be expelled from the Group of Eight, the association of major industrial democracies, said, "You're not going to isolate Russia—that's completely crazy!" He told me that McCain's approach to Russia was one of the reasons that he could not endorse him.

McCain has often spoken about his desire to create a League of Democracies. Discussing Iran during the first Presidential debate, he said, "Let's be clear and let's have some straight talk. The Russians are preventing significant action in the United Nations Security Council. I have proposed a League of Democracies, a group . . . of countries that share common interests, common values, common ideals. They also control a lot of the world's economic power. We could impose significant, meaningful, painful sanctions on the Iranians." He concluded, "So I am convinced that together we can, with the French, with the British, with the Germans and other countries—democracies around the world—we can affect Iranian behavior."

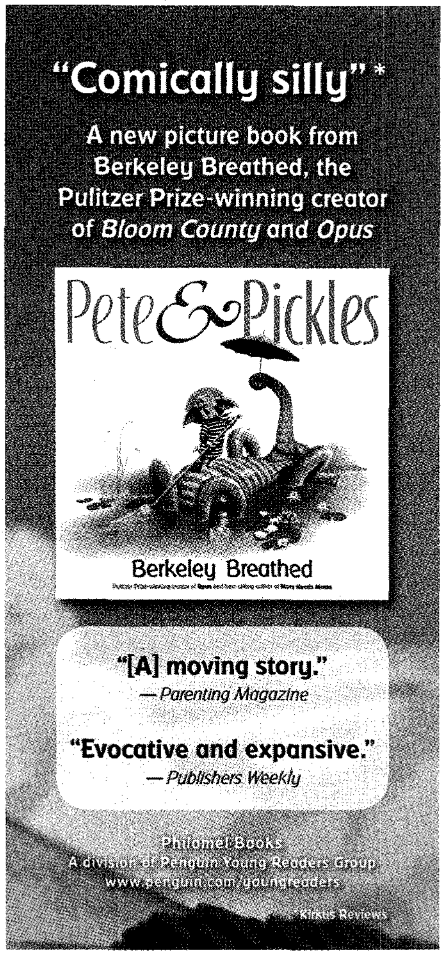
Critics have suggested that McCain's League of Democracies could diminish the role of the United Nations. When I mentioned this to Hagel, he said, "What is the point of the United Nations? The whole point, as anyone who has taken any history knows, was to bring all nations of the world together in some kind of imperfect body, a forum that allows all governments of the world, regardless of what kinds of government, to work through their problems—versus attacking each other and going to war. Now, in John's League of Democracies, does that mean Saudi Arabia is out? Does that mean our friend King Abdullah in Jordan is out? It would be only democracies. Well, we've got a lot of allies and relationships that are pretty important to us, and to our interests, who would be out of that club. And the way John would probably see China and Russia, they wouldn't be in it, either. So it would be an interesting Book-of-the-Month Club.

"But in order to solve problems you've got to have all the players at the table," Hagel went on, his voice rising. "How are you going to fix the problems in Pakistan, Afghanistan—the problems we've got with poverty, proliferation, terrorism, wars—when the largest segments of society in the world today are not at the table?" He paused, then added, more calmly, "The United Nations, as I've said many times, is imperfect. We've got NATO, multilateral institutions, multilateral-development banks, the World Trade Organization—all have flaws, that's true. But if you didn't have them what would you have? A world completely out of control, with no structure, no order, no boundaries."

Hagel and McCain's greatest disagreement remains the Iraq war. McCain has made the surge a keystone of his campaign, citing it as proof that the American military is winning. Hagel, like Obama and Jack Reed, says that it is unclear which factors have contributed most to the reduction in violence in Iraq. The addition of thirty thousand troops doubtless



"I bring humor to this relationship, you bring common sense, and now we just need a cleaning lady."



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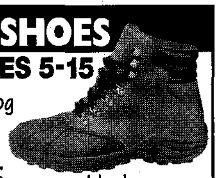

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helped, he said. But so did the Anbar Awakening, in which Sunni tribal leaders decided to fight Islamic militants affiliated with Al Qaeda instead of the Americans; the decision by the Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr to order his militias to stand down; and the introduction of improved intelligence systems. "The surge is one of the great misunderstood tactical situations that we've had in modern times," Hagel said. "Most of the press does not get it. What is the point of bringing the violence down? Why are we investing the lives of eleven hundred Americans killed, thousands wounded, tens of billions of dollars of additional money, undermining our interests around the world?" The strategic goal, of course, was to establish enough peace and security to enable a political reconciliation among the Iraqis. On that score, Hagel argued, there has been "very limited progress." And if the Iraqis don't reach an agreement on sharing the country's oil reserves, he continued, "then they will have civil war, and they may have civil war, regardless." In any case, he pointed out, "We still have more troops there than we had before the surge."

I was speaking with Hagel in early October, shortly before the second Presidential debate. He mentioned that Obama had just called him, and among the many things they discussed was Afghanistan. "Here we are, in a situation where we all agree that the mountain range between Afghanistan and Pakistan represents the biggest threat to our security and the world's security, where the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and terrorist groups are reconstituting," Hagel said. "Pakistan is right on the brink. Yet we do not have enough force structure to put into the location that represents the greatest threat to our security. Why is that? Because of a fatal, fatal error"—the decision to go into Iraq and then to commit an even greater number of troops in the surge. "It has consumed our capacity to deal with anything else in the world. It won't be until sometime next year that you're going to be able to give more troops to General McKiernan"—the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan—"whom poor Governor Palin in her debate kept referring to as General McClellan." Hagel chuckled, and added that that war "was a while back."

McCain has said that an American victory in Iraq will enable the country to become "our stable, democratic ally" against Iran. But Hagel argues that McCain overlooks the reality of Iraq's relationship with Iran. "We bluster, we threaten, we say we're not going to engage [Iran]," Hagel said. "Yet our ally, the elected sovereign government of Iraq, is talking to Iran every day. Maliki"—Nouri al-Maliki, the Iraqi Prime Minister—"and most of the Shia government were exiled in Iran. So we've got Ahmadinejad"—the President of Iran—"in and out of Baghdad, Maliki in and out of Tehran: that's going on without our even acknowledging it." Hagel added that this collaboration should be encouraged, for the sake of stability in Iraq.

"Whether we like it or not, there will be no peace or stability in the Middle East without Iran's participation," Hagel said. In early October, he prevented action on a bill, which had passed in the House, proposing economic sanctions against Iran. Hagel has long criticized unilateral sanctions as ineffective and counterproductive. (Howard Berman, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the legislation's sponsor, told me that he supports unconditional engagement with the Iranians but favors a twofold approach: "You increase the pressure on them, and you offer to engage with them." He added that although he shares Hagel's negative appraisal of the Bush Administration's unilateralism, he thinks that Hagel opposes this kind of action "too sweepingly.")

The notion of "winning" in Iraq is a "failed way of thinking," Hagel said. "If we frame this as win or lose, we'll be there forever." He added that this logic is equally flawed with respect to Afghanistan. "I agree with Obama that we're going to have to put several more brigades in there," he told me. "But there is no military solution, so we have to be very careful that somehow we don't just ricochet out of Iraq into Afghanistan, with another hundred-and-fifty-thousand-troop buildup." According to Hagel, confronting the problems of Afghanistan requires an understanding of its internal politics, its narcotics trade, and its endemic corruption, as well as a regional diplomatic approach, involving Pakistan, India, and Iran.

McCain “thinks we just need more military,” Hagel said. “I’ve talked to John about this many times. I’ve said, ‘John, we’re limited. We’re doing tremendous damage to our Army and Marines, we can’t sustain this.’ ”

Hagel skipped the Republican Convention, choosing instead to go, with two aides, on a fact-finding trip to Latin America. He did hear McCain’s speech, which, in its evocation of the need to bridge a disabling partisan divide, echoed the theme of his discussion with McCain in their meeting in June. But, Hagel said, he’s been “very disappointed” by McCain’s campaign. “He gave one unifying speech and then has spent fifty million dollars to destroy his opponent.” Hagel may be the only senior Republican elected official who has publicly criticized McCain’s choice of Governor Sarah Palin as his running mate. “I don’t believe she’s qualified to be President of the United States,” Hagel told me. “The first judgment a potential President makes is who their running mate is—and I don’t think John made a very good selection.” He scoffed at McCain’s attempts to portray her as an experienced politician. “To try to make the excuse that she looks out her window and sees Russia—and that she’s commander of the Alaska National Guard.” He added, “There is no question that this candidate is arguably the thinnest-résumé candidate for Vice-President in the history of America.” Hagel’s criticisms have prompted protests from Republicans, including Senator Orrin Hatch, of Utah, who said in an e-mail statement to me, “Senator Hagel knows that decades of foreign-policy experience in the Senate did not stop countless Democrats and some Republicans from declaring the surge a failure before it started and recommending instead a disastrous policy of withdrawal and retreat in Iraq.”

For Hagel, almost as disturbing as Palin’s lack of experience is her willingness—in disparaging remarks about Joe Biden’s long Senate career, for example—to belittle the notion that experience is important. “There’s no question, she knows her market,” Hagel said. “She knows her audience, and she’s going right after them. And I’ll tell you why that’s dangerous. It’s dangerous because you don’t want to define down the standards in any institution, ever, in life. You want to always strive to define standards up. If you start defining standards down—‘Well, I don’t have a big education, I don’t have experience’—yes, there’s a point to be made that not all the smartest people come out of Yale or Harvard. But to intentionally define down in some kind of wild populism, that those things don’t count in a complicated, dangerous world—that’s dangerous in itself.

“There was a political party in this country called the Know-Nothings,” he continued. “And we’re getting on the fringe of that, with these one-issue voters—pro-choice or pro-life. Important issue, I know that. But, my goodness. The world is blowing up everywhere, and I just don’t think that is a responsible way to see the world, on that one issue. And, interestingly enough, that is one issue that stopped John McCain from picking one of the people he really wanted, Joe Lieberman or Tom Ridge”—the Independent senator from Connecticut and the Republican former governor of Pennsylvania. (Both men are pro-choice.)

Several of Hagel’s close friends told me they believed that if McCain won the election he would ask Hagel to serve in his Cabinet, as either Secretary of Defense or Secretary of State, and that Hagel would agree, despite their differences. In February, 2006, in an article in the *Times Magazine*, Joseph Lelyveld asked McCain whether he would consider asking Hagel to be his running mate or a member of his Administration, and he quoted McCain as saying, “I’d be honored to have Chuck with me in any capacity. He’d make a great Secretary of State.”

I asked Hagel whether he would accept a post in a McCain Administration, and he said that he had thought about it. “But I don’t see John changing his position and direction and concept of the American role in the world, to adjust to mine,” he went on. “I’m not going to change mine to adjust to his. And I serve at the pleasure of the President. So it wouldn’t work.” ♦

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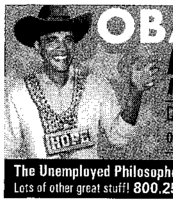

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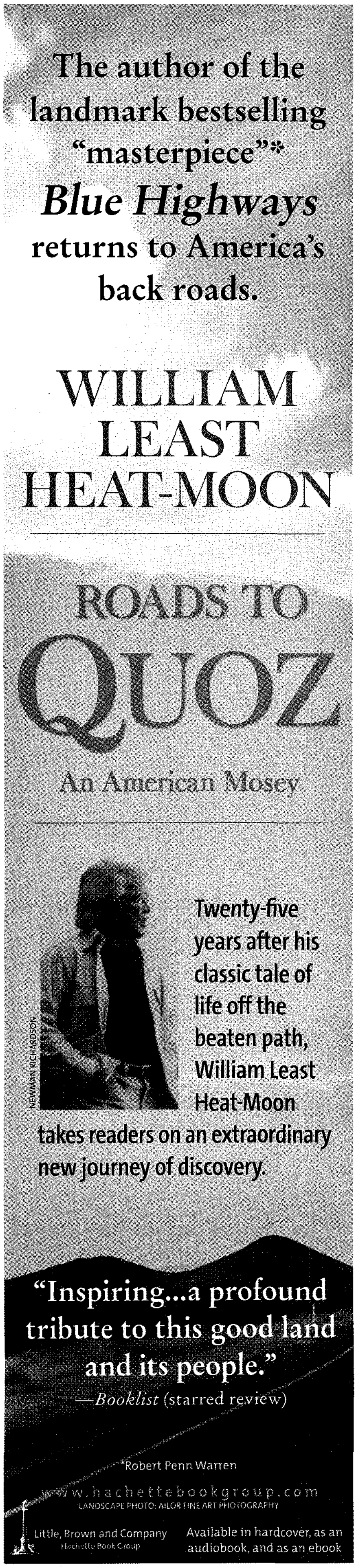
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DEPT. OF DISPUTATION

RED SEX, BLUE SEX

Why do so many evangelical teen-agers become pregnant?

BY MARGARET TALBOT

In early September, when Sarah Palin, the Republican candidate for Vice-President, announced that her unwed seventeen-year-old daughter, Bristol, was pregnant, many liberals were shocked, not by the revelation but by the reaction to it. They expected the news to dismay the evangelical voters that John McCain was courting with his choice of Palin. Yet reports from the floor of the Republican Convention, in St. Paul, quoted dozens of delegates who seemed unfazed, or even buoyed, by the news. A delegate from Louisiana told CBS News, "Like so many other American families who are in the same situation, I think it's great that she instilled in her daughter the values to have the child and not to sneak off someplace and have an abortion." A Mississippi delegate claimed that "even though young children are making that decision to become pregnant, they've also decided to take responsibility for their actions and decided to follow up with that and get married and raise this child." Palin's family drama, delegates said, was similar to the experience of many socially conservative Christian families. As Marlys Popma, the head of evangelical outreach for the McCain campaign, told *National Review*, "There hasn't been one evangelical family that hasn't gone through some sort of situation." In fact, it was Popma's own "crisis pregnancy" that had brought her into the movement in the first place.

During the campaign, the media has largely respected calls to treat Bristol Palin's pregnancy as a private matter. But the reactions to it have exposed a cultural rift that mirrors America's dominant political divide. Social liberals in the country's "blue states" tend to support sex education and are not particularly troubled by the idea that many teen-agers have sex before marriage, but would regard a teen-age daughter's pregnancy as devastating news. And the social conservatives in "red states" generally advocate abstinence-only education and denounce sex before marriage, but are relatively unruffled if a teen-ager becomes pregnant, as long as she doesn't choose to have an abortion.

A handful of social scientists and family-law scholars have recently begun looking closely at this split. Last year, Mark Regnerus, a sociologist at the University of Texas at Austin, published a startling book called "Forbidden Fruit: Sex and Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers," and he is working on a follow-up that includes a section titled "Red Sex, Blue Sex." His findings are drawn from a national survey that Regnerus and his colleagues conducted of some thirty-four hundred thirteen-to-seventeen-year-olds, and from a comprehensive government study of adolescent health known as Add Health. Regnerus argues that religion is a good indicator of attitudes toward sex, but a poor one of sexual behavior, and that this gap is especially wide among teen-agers who identify themselves as evangelical. The vast majority of white evangelical adolescents—seventy-four per cent—say that they believe in abstaining from sex before marriage. (Only half of mainline Protestants, and a quarter of Jews, say that they believe in abstinence.) Moreover, among the major religious groups, evangelical virgins are the least likely to anticipate that sex will be pleasurable, and the most likely to believe that having sex will cause their partners to lose respect for them. (Jews most often cite pleasure as a reason to have sex, and say that an unplanned pregnancy would be an embarrassment.) But, according to Add Health data, evangelical teen-agers are more sexually active than Mormons, mainline Protestants, and Jews. On average, white evangelical Protestants make their "sexual début"—to use the festive term of social-science researchers—shortly after turning sixteen. Among major religious groups, only black Protestants begin having sex earlier.

Another key difference in behavior, Regnerus reports, is that evangelical Protestant teen-agers are significantly less likely than other groups to use contraception. This could be because evangelicals are also among the most likely to believe that using contraception will send the message that they are looking for sex. It could also be because many evangelicals are steeped in the abstinence movement's warnings that condoms won't actually protect them from pregnancy or venereal disease. More provocatively, Regnerus found that only half of sexually active teen-agers who say that they seek guidance from God or the Scriptures when making a tough decision report using contraception every time. By contrast, sixty-nine per cent of sexually active youth who say that they most often follow the counsel of a parent or another trusted adult consistently use protection.

The gulf between sexual belief and sexual behavior becomes apparent, too, when you look at the outcomes of abstinence-pledge movements. Nationwide, according to a 2001 estimate, some two and a half million people have taken a pledge to remain celibate until marriage. Usually, they do so under the auspices of movements such as True Love Waits or the Silver Ring Thing. Sometimes, they make their vows at big rallies featuring Christian pop stars and laser light shows, or at purity balls, where girls in frothy dresses exchange rings with their fathers, who vow to help them remain virgins until the day they marry. More than half of those who take such pledges—which, unlike abstinence-only classes in public schools, are explicitly Christian—end up having sex before marriage, and not usually with their future spouse. The movement is not the complete washout its critics portray it as: pledgers delay sex eighteen months longer than non-pledgers, and have fewer partners. Yet, according to the sociologists Peter Bearman, of Columbia University, and Hannah Brückner, of Yale, communities with high rates of pledging also have high rates of S.T.D.s. This could be because more teens pledge in communities where they perceive more danger from sex (in which case the pledge is doing some good); or it could be because fewer people in these communities use condoms when they break the pledge.

Bearman and Brückner have also identified a peculiar dilemma: in some schools, if too many teens pledge, the effort basically collapses. Pledgers apparently gather strength from the sense that they are an embattled minority; once their numbers exceed thirty per cent, and proclaimed chastity becomes the norm, that special identity is lost. With such a fragile formula, it's hard to imagine how educators can ever get it right: once the self-proclaimed virgin clique hits the thirty-one-per-cent mark, suddenly it's Sodom and Gomorrah.

The "sexual début" of an evangelical girl typically occurs just after she turns sixteen. Photograph by Mary Ellen Mark.

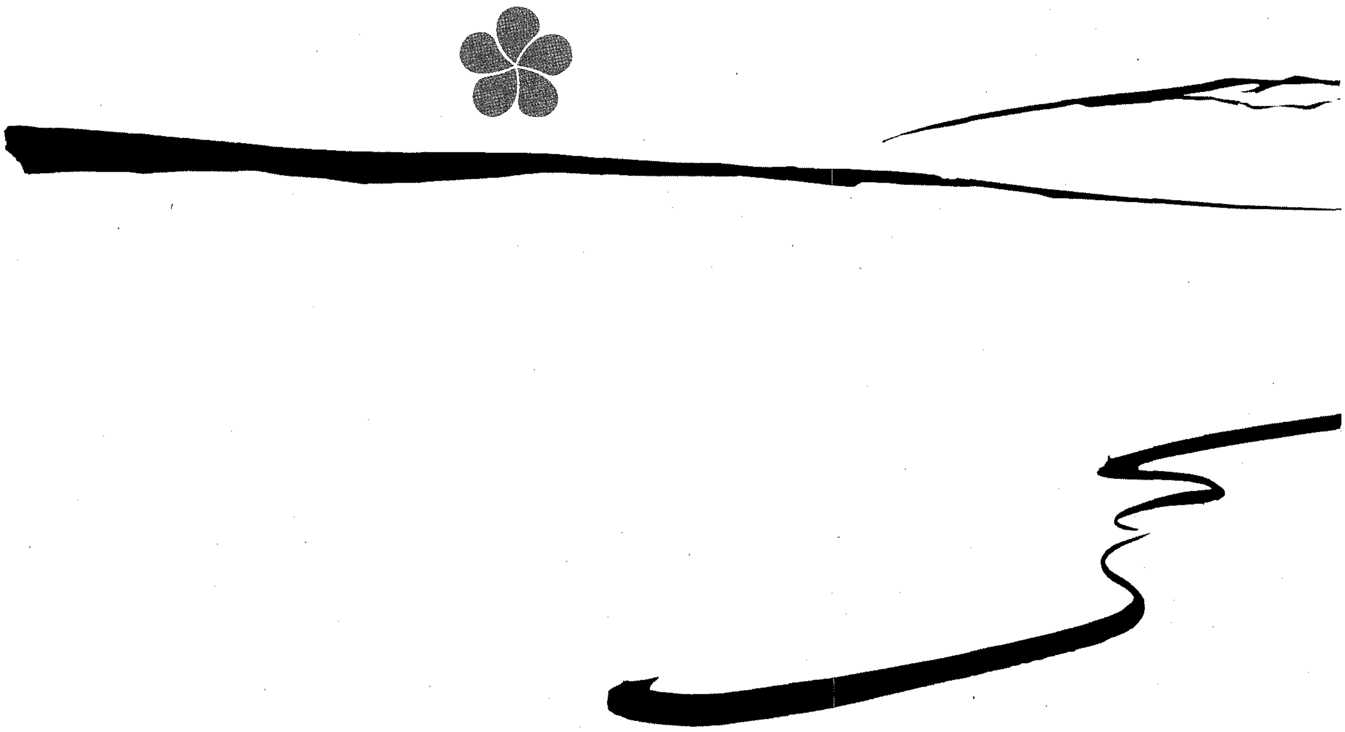
Religious belief apparently does make a potent difference in behavior for one group of evangelical teen-agers: those who score highest on measures of religiosity—such as how often they go to church, or how often they pray at home. But many Americans who identify themselves as evangelicals, and who hold socially conservative beliefs, aren't deeply observant.

Even more important than religious conviction, Regnerus argues, is how "embedded" a teen-ager is in a network of friends, family, and institutions that reinforce his or her goal of delaying sex, and that offer a plausible alternative to America's sexed-up consumer culture. A church, of course, isn't the only way to provide a cohesive sense of community. Close-knit families make a difference. Teen-agers who live with both biological parents are more likely to be virgins than those who do not. And adolescents who say that their families understand them, pay attention to their concerns, and have fun with them are more likely to delay intercourse, regardless of religiosity.

A terrific 2005 documentary, "The Education of Shelby Knox," tells the story of a teen-ager from a Southern Baptist family in Lubbock, Texas, who has taken a True Love Waits pledge. To the chagrin of her youth pastor, and many of her neighbors, Knox eventually becomes an activist for comprehensive sex education. At her high school, kids receive abstinence-only education, but, Knox says, "maybe twice a week I see a girl walking down the hall pregnant." In the film, Knox seems successful at remaining chaste, but less because she took a pledge than because she has a fearlessly independent mind and the kind of parents who—despite their own conservative leanings—admire her outspokenness. Devout Republicans, her parents end up driving her around town to make speeches that would have curled their hair before their daughter started making them. Her mother even comes to take pride in Shelby's efforts, because while abstinence pledges are lovely in the abstract, they don't acknowledge "reality."

Like other American teens, young evangelicals live in a world of Internet porn, celebrity sex scandals, and raunchy reality TV, and they have the same hormonal urges that their peers have. Yet they come from families and communities in which sexual life is supposed to be forestalled until the first night of a transcendent honeymoon. Regnerus writes, "In such an atmosphere, attitudes about sex may *formally* remain unchanged (and restrictive) while sexual activity becomes increasingly common. This clash of cultures and norms is felt most poignantly in the so-called Bible Belt." Symbolic commitment to the institution of marriage remains strong there, and politically motivating—hence the drive to outlaw gay marriage—but the actual practice of it is scattershot.

Among blue-state social liberals, commitment to the institution of marriage tends to be unspoken or discreet, but marriage in practice typically works pretty well. Two family-law scholars, Naomi Cahn, of George Washington University, and June Carbone, of the University of Missouri at Kansas City,



are writing a book on the subject, and they argue that "red families" and "blue families" are "living different lives, with different moral imperatives." (They emphasize that the Republican-Democrat divide is less important than the higher concentration of "moral-values voters" in red states.) In 2004, the states with the highest divorce rates were Nevada, Arkansas, Wyoming, Idaho, and West Virginia (all red states in the 2004 election); those with the lowest were Illinois, Massachusetts, Iowa, Minnesota, and New Jersey. The highest teen-pregnancy rates were in Nevada, Arizona, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Texas (all red); the lowest were in North Dakota, Vermont, New Hampshire, Minnesota, and Maine (blue except for North Dakota). "The 'blue states' of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic have lower teen birthrates, higher use of abortion, and lower percentages of teen births within marriage," Cahn and Carbone observe. They also note that people start families earlier in red states—in part because they are more inclined to deal with an unplanned pregnancy by marrying rather than by seeking an abortion.

Of all variables, the age at marriage may be the pivotal difference between red and blue families. The five states with the lowest median age at marriage are Utah, Oklahoma, Idaho, Arkansas, and Kentucky, all red states, while those with the highest are all blue: Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Jersey. The red-state model puts couples at greater risk for divorce; women who marry before their mid-twenties are significantly more likely to divorce than those who marry later. And younger couples are more likely to be contending with two of the biggest stressors on a marriage: financial struggles and the birth of a baby before, or soon after, the wedding.

There are, of course, plenty of exceptions to these rules—messily divorcing professional couples in Boston, high-school sweethearts who stay sweetly together in rural Idaho. Still, Cahn and Carbone conclude, "the paradigmatic red-state couple enters marriage not long after the woman becomes sexually active, has two children by her mid-twenties, and reaches the critical period of marriage at the high point in the life cycle for risk-taking and experimentation. The paradigmatic blue-state couple is more likely to experiment with multiple partners, postpone marriage until after they reach emotional and financial maturity, and have their children (if they have them at all) as their lives are stabilizing."

Some of these differences in sexual behavior come down to class and education. Regnerus and Carbone and Cahn all see a new and distinct "middle-class morality" taking shape among economically and socially advantaged families who are not social conservatives. In Regnerus's survey, the teen-agers who espouse this new morality are tolerant of premarital sex (and of contraception and abortion) but are themselves cautious

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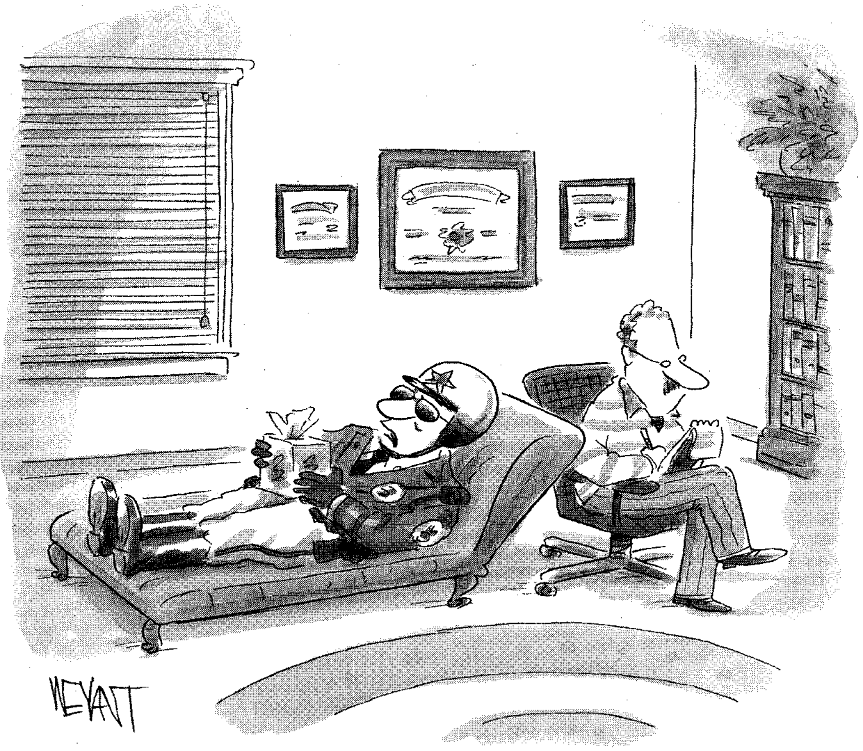


"Sometimes I can't remember if I'm good cop or bad cop."

about pursuing it. Regnerus writes, "They are interested in remaining free from the burden of teenage pregnancy and the sorrows and embarrassments of sexually transmitted diseases. They perceive a bright future for themselves, one with college, advanced degrees, a career, and a family. Simply put, too much seems at stake. Sexual intercourse is not worth the risks." These are the kids who tend to score high on measures of "strategic orientation"—how analytical, methodical, and fact-seeking they are when making decisions. Because these teenagers see abstinence as unrealistic, they are not opposed in principle to sex before marriage—just careful about it. Accordingly, they might delay intercourse in favor of oral sex, not because they cherish the idea of remaining "technical virgins" but because they assess it as a safer option. "Solidly middle- or upper-middle-class adolescents have considerable socioeconomic and educational expectations, courtesy of their parents and their communities' lifestyles," Regnerus writes. "They are happy with their direction, generally not rebellious, tend to get along with their parents, and have few moral qualms about expressing their nascent sexuality." They might have loved Ellen Page in "Juno," but in real life they'd see having a baby at the wrong time as a tragic derailment of their life plans. For this group, Regnerus says, unprotected sex has become "a moral issue like smoking or driving a car without a seatbelt. It's not just unwise anymore; it's wrong."

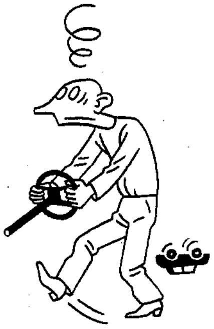
Each of these models of sexual behavior has drawbacks—in the blue-state scheme, people may postpone childbearing to the point where infertility becomes an issue. And delaying childbearing is better suited to the more affluent, for whom it yields economic benefits, in the form of educational opportunities and career advancement. But Carbone and Cahn argue that the red-state model is clearly failing on its own terms—producing high rates of teen pregnancy, divorce, sexually transmitted disease, and other dysfunctional outcomes that social conservatives say they abhor. In "Forbidden Fruit," Regnerus offers an "unscientific postscript," in which he advises social conservatives that if they really want to maintain their commitment to chastity and to marriage, they'll need to do more to help young couples stay married longer. As the Reverend Rick Marks, a Southern Baptist minister, recently pointed out in a Florida newspaper, "Evangelicals are fighting gay marriage, saying it will break down traditional marriage, when divorce has already broken it down." Conservatives may need to start talking as much about saving marriages as they do about, say, saving oneself for marriage.

"Having to wait until age twenty-five or thirty to have sex *is* unreasonable," Regnerus writes. He argues that religious organizations that advocate chastity should "work more creatively to support younger marriages. This is not the 1950s (for which I am glad), where one could bank on social norms, extended (and larger) families, and clear gender roles to negotiate and sustain early family formation."

Evangelicals could start, perhaps, by trying to untangle the contradictory portrayals of sex that they offer to teenagers. In the Shelby Knox documentary, a youth pastor, addressing an assembly of teens, defines intercourse as "what two dogs do out on the street corner—they just bump and grind awhile, *boom boom boom*." Yet a typical evangelical text aimed at young people, "Every Young Woman's Battle," by Shannon Ethridge and Stephen Arterburn, portrays sex between two virgins as an ethereal communion of innocent souls: "physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual pleasure beyond description." Neither is the most realistic or helpful view for a young person to take into marriage, as a few advocates of abstinence acknowledge. The savvy young Christian writer Lauren Winner, in her book "Real Sex: The Naked Truth About Chastity," writes, "Rather than spending our unmarried years stewarding and disciplining our desires, we have become ashamed of them. We persuade ourselves that the desires themselves are horrible. This can have real consequences if we do get married." Teenagers and single adults are "told over and over not to have sex, but no one ever encourages" them "to be bodily or sensual in some appropriate way"—getting to know and appreciate what their bodies can do through sports, especially for girls, or even thinking sensually about something like food. Winner goes on, "This doesn't mean, of course, that if only the church sponsored more softball leagues, everyone would stay on the chaste straight and narrow. But it does mean that the church ought to cultivate ways of teaching Christians to live in their bodies well—so that unmarried folks can still be bodily people, even though they're not having sex, and so that married people can give themselves to sex freely.”

Too often, though, evangelical literature directed at teen-agers forbids all forms of sexual behavior, even masturbation. “Every Young Woman's Battle,” for example, tells teen-agers that “the momentary relief” of “self-gratification” can lead to “shame, low self-esteem, and fear of what others might think or that something is wrong with you.” And it won't slake sexual desire: “Once you begin feeding baby monsters, their appetites grow bigger and they want MORE! It's better not to feed such a monster in the first place.”

Shelby Knox, who spoke at a congressional hearing on sex education earlier this year, occupies a middle ground. She testified that it's possible to “believe in abstinence in a religious sense,” but still understand that abstinence-only education is dangerous “for students who simply are not abstaining.” As Knox's approach makes clear, you don't need to break out the sex toys to teach sex ed—you can encourage teen-agers to postpone sex for all kinds of practical, emotional, and moral reasons. A new “abstinence-plus” curriculum, now growing in popularity, urges abstinence while providing accurate information about contraception and reproduction for those who have sex anyway. “Abstinence works,” Knox said at the hearing. “Abstinence-only-until-marriage does not.”



It might help, too, not to present virginity as the cornerstone of a virtuous life. In certain evangelical circles, the concept is so emphasized that a girl who regrets having been sexually active is encouraged to declare herself a “secondary” or “born-again” virgin. That's not an idea, surely, that helps teen-agers postpone sex or have it responsibly.

The “pro-family” efforts of social conservatives—the campaigns against gay marriage and abortion—do nothing to instill the emotional discipline or the psychological smarts that forsaking all others often involves. Evangelicals are very good at articulating their sexual ideals, but they have little practical advice for their young followers. Social liberals, meanwhile, are not very good at articulating values on marriage and teen sexuality—indeed, they may feel that it's unseemly or judgmental to do so. But in fact the new middle-class morality is squarely pro-family. Maybe these choices weren't originally about values—maybe they were about maximizing education and careers—yet the result is a more stable family system. Not only do couples who marry later stay married longer; children born to older couples fare better on a variety of measures, including educational attainment, regardless of their parents' economic circumstances. The new middle-class culture of intensive parenting has ridiculous aspects, but it's pretty successful at turning out productive, emotionally resilient young adults. And its intensity may be one reason that teen-agers from close families see child-rearing as a project for which they're not yet ready. For too long, the conventional wisdom has been that social conservatives are the upholders of family values, whereas liberals are the proponents of a polymorphous selfishness. This isn't true, and, every once in a while, liberals might point that out.

Some evangelical Christians are starting to reckon with the failings of the preaching-and-pledging approach. In “The Education of Shelby Knox,” for example, Shelby's father is uncomfortable, at first, with his daughter's campaign. Lubbock, after all, is a town so conservative that its local youth pastor tells Shelby, “You ask me sometimes why I look at you a little funny. It's because I hear you speak and I hear tolerance.” But as her father listens to her arguments he realizes that the no-tolerance ethic simply hasn't worked in their deeply Christian community. Too many girls in town are having sex, and having babies that they can't support. As Shelby's father declares toward the end of the film, teen-age pregnancy “is a problem—a major, major problem that everybody's just shoving under the rug.” ♦

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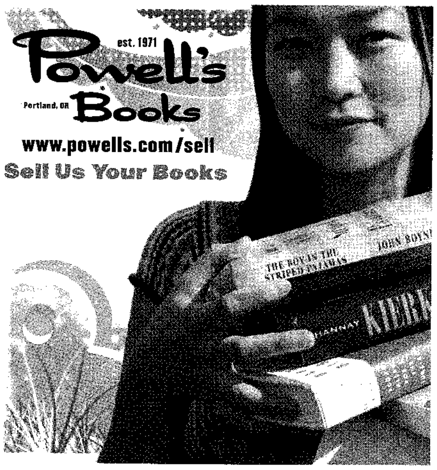
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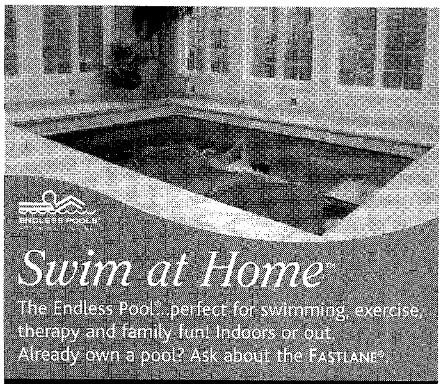
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The P.M.'s sex follies.

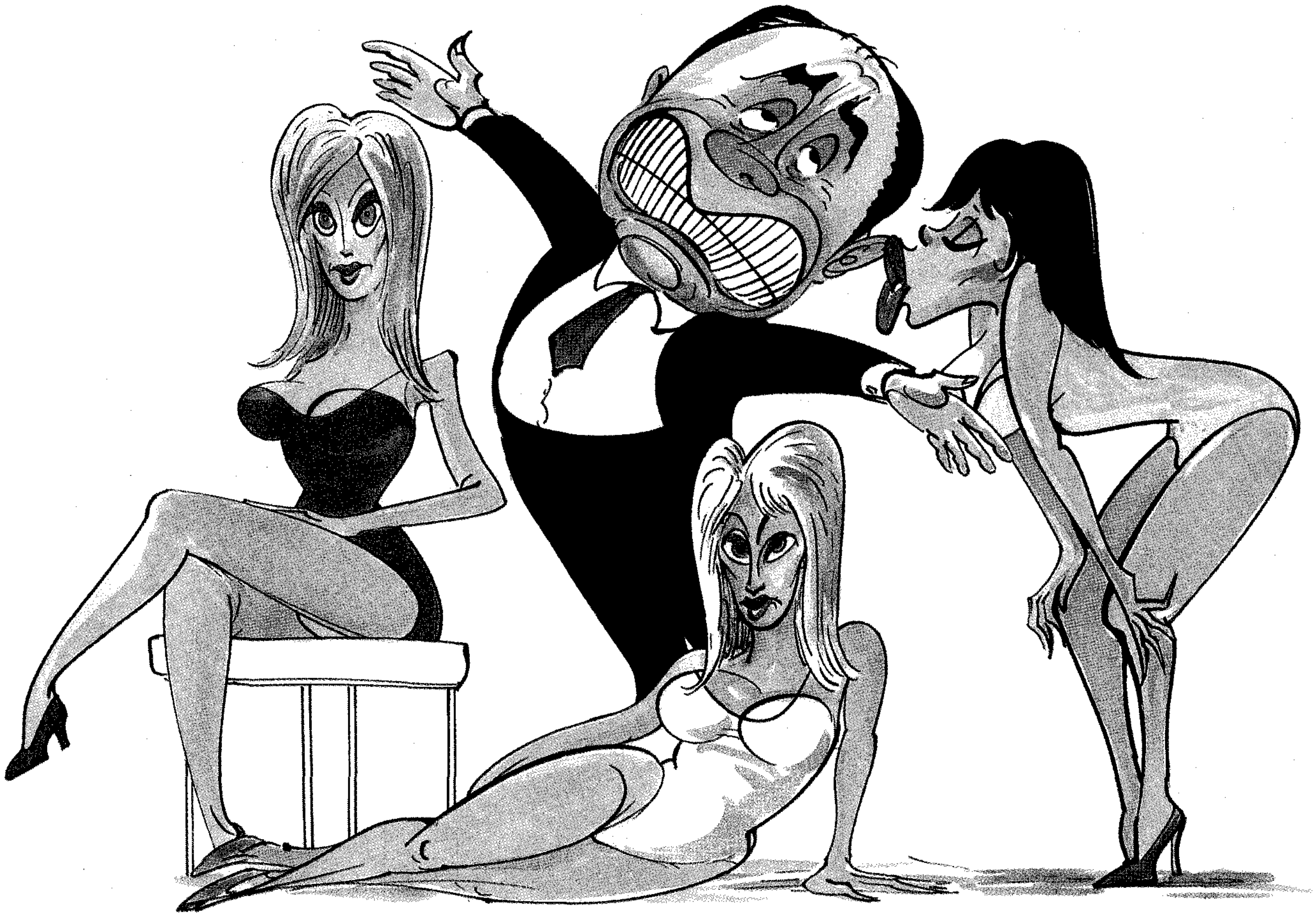
BY ALEXANDER STILLE

Silvio Berlusconi, the seventy-two-year-old Italian Prime Minister, is no stranger to scandal. Having survived some seventeen criminal trials without ultimately being convicted, he has inured the Italian public to feelings of shock or indignation. Last January, the prosecutor's office in Naples indicted Berlusconi and issued a report containing extracts of more than a thousand wiretapped conversations depicting Italy's state TV network, RAI, as a casting couch that Berlusconi used to grant favors to aspiring actresses—he called them "*le fanciulle mie*" ("my girls")—and to try to bring down the government. The report had no impact. In the national elections in the spring, Berlusconi returned triumphantly to power with his center-right People of Liberty coalition after less than two years in the opposition. But in early summer, when the Naples prosecutors indicated that there were hundreds of other wiretaps as well, of a purely personal nature, which they requested be destroyed, Italy's political-journalistic gossip mill began churning. Forget abuse of power and possible criminal wrongdoing—bring on the sex! Press reports speculated that the tapes contained raunchy comments involving Berlusconi and three female members of his government. The rumors about the Prime Minister's supposed shenanigans are often colored by political affiliation: Berlusconi's critics favor the stories about a doddering septuagenarian addicted to penis pumps and mysterious injections; supporters like to paint him as a tireless Don Juan, capable of satisfying two or three women at once.

During the election campaign, Berlusconi helped fuel speculation by bragging about how much more beautiful his party's female candidates for parliament were than those of his center-left opponents. Referring to Gianfranco Fini, the leader of the Chamber of Deputies and his principal coalition partner, he said of their decision to make thirty per cent of their candidates women, "There is already a rush to examine the past and say they're all my and Gianfranco's girlfriends." He went on, "We are kind of supermen in this way, let's be clear, but even we have our limits." In any case, Berlusconi has installed in the parliament, and even in his government, a number of former starlets who gained fame in his TV empire.

Antonio Di Pietro, a former prosecutor who heads one of the main opposition parties, publicly called Berlusconi *un magnaccia*, a colorful term for pimp, because of the time he has spent finding work for "showgirls" rather than solving government problems. At a protest in Rome this summer, the popular Italian comedian Sabina Guzzanti said of one Berlusconi appointee, Mara Carfagna, a former Miss Italy contestant who worked as a showgirl on Berlusconi's TV stations before entering parliament, "You can't make someone Minister of Equal Opportunity just because she's sucked your cock!" (Carfagna is suing Guzzanti for defamation and has steadfastly denied any sexual relationship with Berlusconi.) Vittorio Feltri, the editor of the right-wing newspaper *Libero*, took the opposite view. "I wouldn't worry if I were Berlusconi," he said. "Mussolini also had his women. We need a Prime Minister, not a Trappist monk."

Berlusconi talks openly about sex and does little to hide the fact that he has had a face-lift and hair transplants. In his politics, he combines archaic forms of sovereignty with modern elements of media charisma. The Milan daily *Corriere della Sera* recently quoted him half complaining and half boasting about being treated like a king whose royal touch is thought to have healing powers. "Pregnant mothers ask me to put a hand on their stomachs, others on their eyes because they have trouble seeing," Berlusconi said. "Some, imagine, on their heads because they're going bald. But in that case all I



"We need a Prime Minister, not a Trappist monk," a right-wing editor commented, in support of Berlusconi.

GERALD SCARFE

have to do is give them the phone number of my doctor."

In addition to various women whose favors he is rumored to have enjoyed, Berlusconi has brought to the new parliament three of his criminal-defense attorneys (who devise legislation that may help their client); his tax consultant; several co-defendants in various corruption cases; a long list of former and current executives in his many companies; columnists and editors of his many newspapers; and his personal physician.

As a result, the seat of the Chamber of Deputies, partly designed by Bernini, with its beautiful marble floors and soaring ceilings, has become the new Via Veneto. The center of its social life is a long, handsome room known as the *transatlantico*, the ocean liner, where members of parliament sit on comfortable leather couches and chairs or stand around and chat with colleagues and journalists.

On one of the days I happened to visit, someone whispered, "*Ecco la Carfagna!*" as the much maligned Minister of Equal Opportunity moved through the crowd. Carfagna has undergone a major makeover since her days on television, when she favored short skirts and décolleté blouses. One of the more popular online videos in Italy this summer was called "They've seen my ass even in Germany," which featured Carfagna as a showgirl being twirled in the air during a dance routine, her skirt flying up to her waist. (At a large gala last year, Berlusconi remarked to Carfagna, "If I weren't already married, I'd marry you!" The result was a highly publicized spat with his wife, Veronica Lario.) Now Carfagna has a short, severe (but very fashionable) haircut and wears a sober gray business suit, but she is only thirty-two, and her large brown eyes make her appear even younger. She was trailed closely by an aide who kept journalists at bay. Discussing gossip, Carfagna has said, "is not part of the mandate of my ministry."

Decidedly less sober is the Under-Secretary of Tourism, Michela Vittoria Brambilla, another former Miss Italy contestant, who once hosted a TV program called "Mysteries of the Night," which focussed on the night life of cities around the world. (A popular YouTube video depicts her visiting a Barcelona S&M club featuring men on leather leashes, bare-breasted women, and rubdowns with exotic fruits.) Brambilla also worked as a television reporter, and went on to become the managing director of her family's steel business. The tourism post is said to have been her second choice; because of her love of animals, she reportedly wanted to become Minister of the Environment. She still has television looks, from her long red hair, low-cut blouse, and micro-miniskirt down to her "slave sandals," with four-inch heels and an elaborate web of leather ties that climb suggestively up her legs.

The Minister of Education, Mariastella Gelmini, now thirty-five, is staid by comparison. Gelmini not only has no past in show business; she actually has significant, if brief, experience in politics. She is trying to work out a plan to give more local control to schools. (Both Brambilla and Gelmini also deny any claims of impropriety.)

Between votes, Niccolò Ghedini, one

of Berlusconi's criminal-defense attorneys, likes to hang out at the *transatlantico* bar, eating cherries. For the past several years, he has shuttled between the Milan courtroom where Berlusconi has been tried on a series of corruption charges and the parliament, where he has helped write a series of laws that have kept Berlusconi and some of his closest associates out of prison. When I spoke with him, he explained calmly and patiently why it was appropriate for the new parliament to pass a law that allowed Berlusconi's broadcasting empire, Mediaset, to keep a television-channel frequency that by Italian law and European Union rules had been assigned to someone else. (Restrictions on television ownership don't make sense in an age of digital television, he argued.) He also told me why it was necessary to pass a law exempting Berlusconi from any criminal prosecution while he is Prime Minister. (Italy's judiciary is entirely autonomous; therefore, he reasoned, it is crucial to have greater defenses for the executive.) The law has short-circuited a case that was about to be decided in which Berlusconi was accused of paying off his British lawyer to give false testimony in two trials, including one about Berlusconi's role in establishing a secret offshore bank account belonging to Fininvest, Berlusconi's holding company, to finance the Socialist leader Bettino Craxi. (Both men deny the charges.) More recently, Berlusconi has pushed a bill to restrict the use of wiretaps in all prosecutions not involving terrorism or the Mafia, and to jail for up to three years journalists who publish leaked wiretaps.

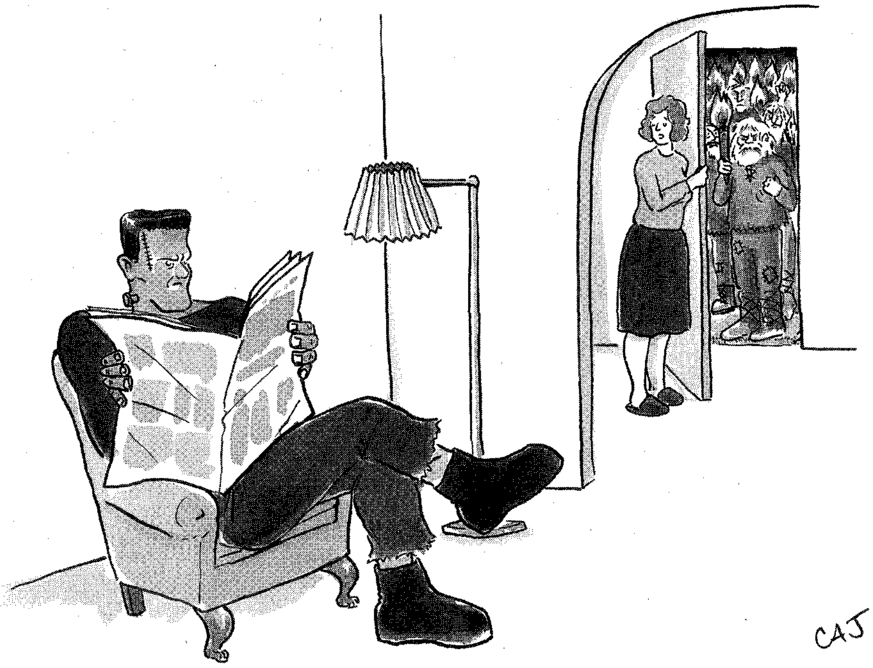
It's difficult not to be charmed by Deputy Umberto Scapagnini, Berlusconi's personal physician, whose theories of longevity drew him into Berlusconi's circle. He keeps the Prime Minister on a special regimen of diet, exercise, amino acids, vitamins, and antioxidants. "Berlusconi is the most extraordinary psycho-physical subject I have ever examined," Scapagnini told me. "And I am not saying this because I'm a brownnoser. I am an internationally respected scientist—I don't need to curry favor." Scapagnini, who has travelled the Silk Road and studied the dietary habits of the residents of Okinawa looking for the secrets of long life, has helped develop a method for measuring what he calls a person's true biological age (the measurement of certain hormones and an examination of fifty strands of DNA as well as the person's immune system), which can vary considerably from one's actual age. "Berlusconi is fifteen years younger than his chronological age," Scapagnini continued. "He has an amazing immune system and powers of resistance. He has a magnetic personality and an exceptional capacity to communicate. He is perhaps the patient I've examined who has the capacity to live the longest. If you see him in a bathing suit, he has the musculature and tone of a much, much younger man." Scapagnini hopes to keep the P.M. alive until the age of a hundred and twenty, which he considers within the natural life span of a human being.

As for women, Scapagnini said, "Certainly, he has a strong sexual personality, and they are highly attracted to him. Naturally, for his part, as with any of us, this is not unpleasant. But, as with everything having to do with Berlusconi, it quickly turned to legend, and he has been the object of a disgraceful violation of privacy that would never be permitted in the United States."

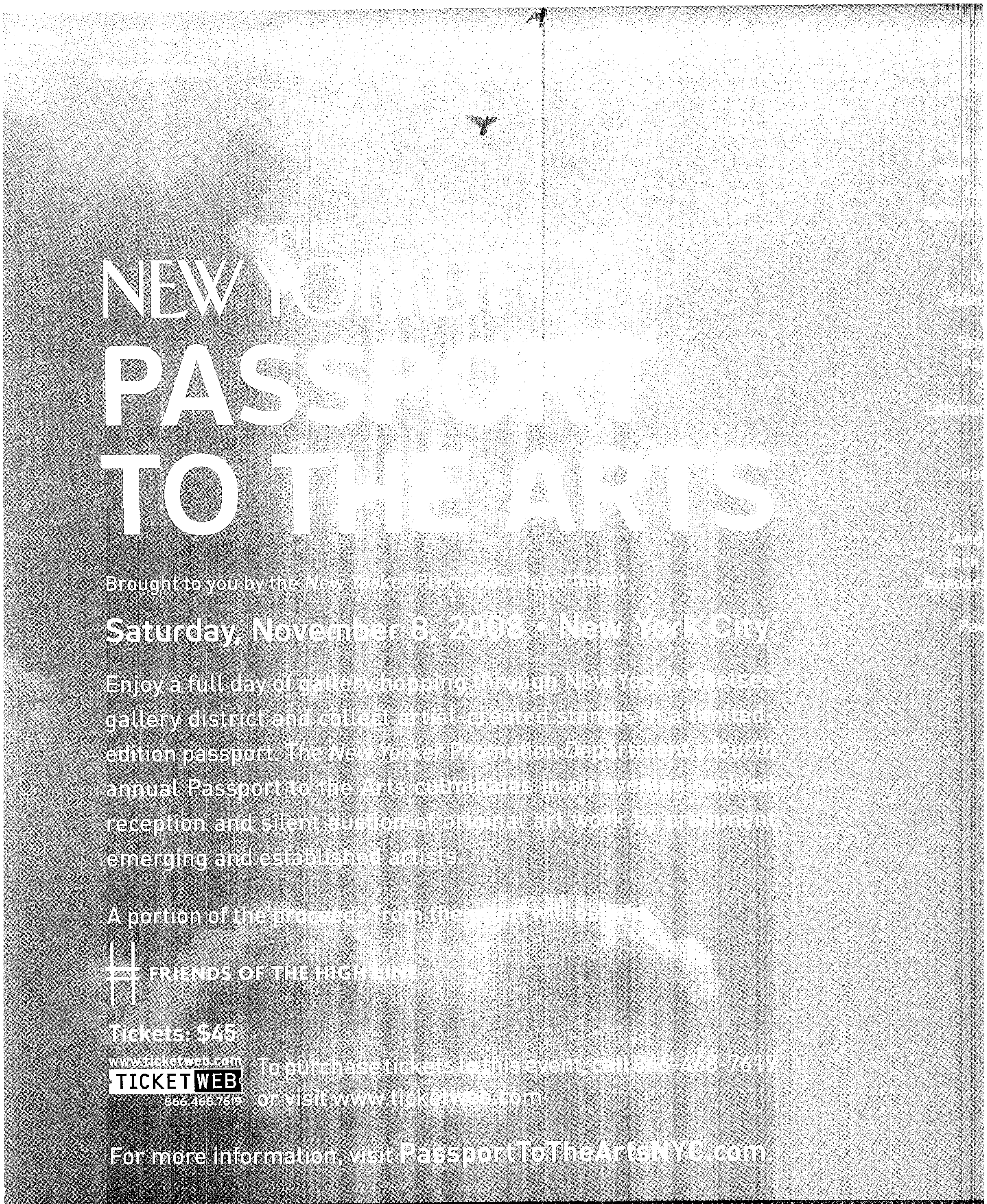
Sex has always played a considerable role in Berlusconi's carefully cultivated image. He began his career in Milan real estate, constructing apartment complexes and bringing an American-style gated community to the area, and then became a pioneer in private television, helping break down the state monopoly in broadcasting. With the help of much political backing, he established a virtual monopoly on private TV in Italy: since the early nineteen-eighties, he has been the principal owner of the three largest private channels, which, together with the three state TV channels, account for more than ninety per cent of the market.

In speeches to his sales force, Berlusconi used to boast about how, early in his career in real estate, he helped close a crucial deal by seducing someone's secretary. Berlusconi, in fact, introduced sex into Italian television, and changed a national culture. For most of the post-Second World War period, Italy was dominated by the Catholic Church (together with the Christian Democratic Party) and the Italian Communist Party, all of which were rather prudish. Not only did Berlusconi broadcast "Dallas" and "Dynasty"; he introduced a program called "Colpo Grosso," a mystifying game-show striptease that invariably ended with the contestants—a man and a woman—in their underwear, the woman topless.

Berlusconi didn't mind using his TV contacts to advance his standing in the political world. We get a taste of this from a wiretap made in 1986, after Bettino Craxi had become Prime Minister



"It's for you."



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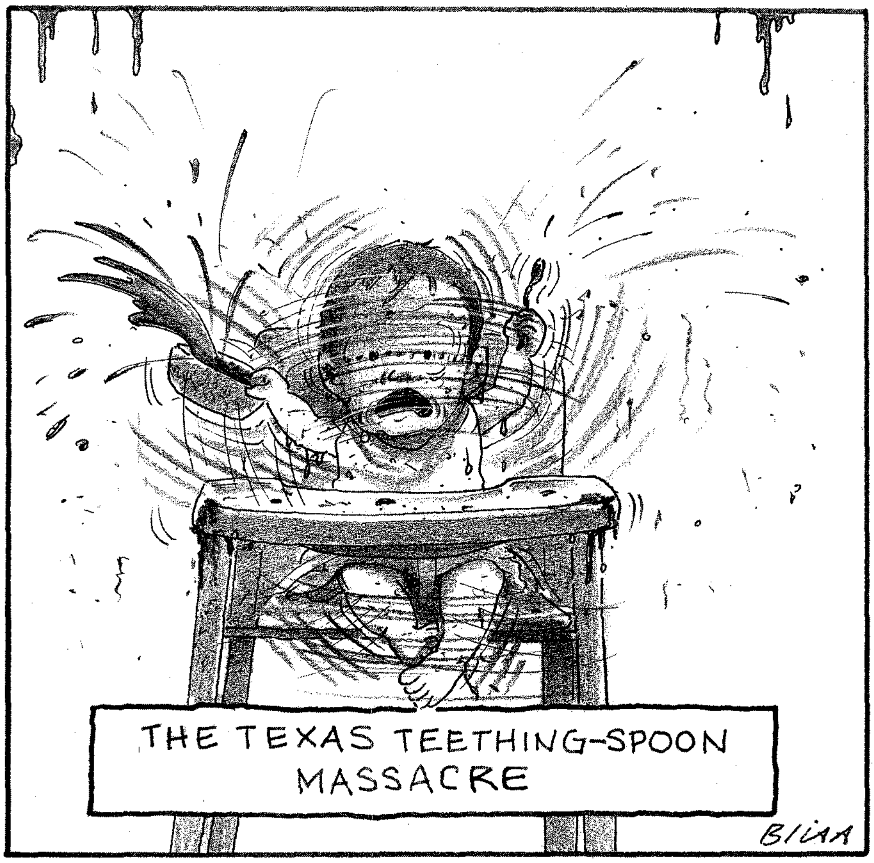

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and had helped Berlusconi to acquire his virtual monopoly on private television in Italy. At the time, police tapped a phone call between Berlusconi and one of his closest advisers, Marcello Dell'Utri, who was suspected of laundering money for the Sicilian Mafia. (He was convicted of conspiring with the Mafia in 2004, and is appealing the conviction.) On December 31, 1986, Dell'Utri and Berlusconi exchanged New Year's greetings, and the topic turned to sex:

BERLUSCONI: The New Year is off to a bad start!

DELL'UTRI: Why?

BERLUSCONI: Because two girls from "Drive In" [a Fininvest TV show] were supposed to come and they stood us up! And Craxi is out of his mind with anger!

DELL'UTRI: What do you care about "Drive In"?

BERLUSCONI: What do I care? It means *we're not going to fuck!* If the year starts like this, it means we won't fuck anymore!

For all its froth, the latest gossip-fest originated in a serious criminal investigation. Prosecutors in Naples were investigating Agostino Saccà, the former head of the drama division of RAI, and his relations with Berlusconi. The prosecutors contend that Saccà abused his position by doing favors for Berlusconi in exchange for help in setting up a private film-production company in Calabria, a project that he was trying to get under way while still on the public payroll. "I'll return the favor when you are in business on your own," Berlusconi had reportedly told Saccà. This is what many feared when Berlusconi entered politics: that he would use his vast power as the country's richest man to distort the function of government—to, in effect, bribe a public servant into serving Berlusconi instead of the public.

Several wiretaps of the investigations were obtained by the news magazine *L'Espresso* and put up on its Web site. Recorded in 2007, when Berlusconi was out of power, they are a study in sycophancy:

SACCÀ: Presidente! Good evening, Presidente.... How are you?

BERLUSCONI: Getting by....

SACCÀ: No.... Getting by in grand form, I must say, even with so many difficulties.... You remain the most beloved figure in the country....

BERLUSCONI: Politically, I'm nowhere ... but socially they mistake me for the Pope.

SACCÀ: That's just my point, you are the most beloved in the country, I say this without any intent to flatter ... but it's stupendous, because there's a need for ... there's a void ... that you fill emotionally for the people.... We feel it.

Then they turn to the business of the call. Berlusconi wants help in maintaining the center-right's control of RAI, even though the center-left is running the government.

SACCÀ: You are the only one who has never asked me for anything....

BERLUSCONI: Except from time to time about women ... to boost the boss's morale.

Then Berlusconi moves on to a new point: he wants two actresses hired, one of them for an explicitly political purpose. Saccà, like any good dispenser of patronage, doesn't want to know why:

BERLUSCONI: Let me explain this thing....

SACCÀ: No, Presidente, you don't have to explain anything.

BERLUSCONI: No, I'll explain it: I am trying to get ...

SACCÀ: Presidente, you are a very civil, correct person....

BERLUSCONI: I am trying to get ... the majority in the Senate ... and this Evelina Manna could be ... because she's been recommended by someone with whom I'm negotiating.

In this period, Berlusconi was trying to overturn the center-left government of Romano Prodi, which was sustained by a one-vote majority in the Senate. One senator claims that he was offered a substantial sum of money by a supporter of the center-right to switch sides, and in this phone call Berlusconi makes it quite clear that he is hoping to get a part for an actress on behalf of another center-left senator, in order to bring down the government. (Saccà and Berlusconi deny that they did anything improper, and Saccà says that the two actresses mentioned in the conversation were merely auditioned, not hired. Saccà remains under investigation, and his lawyers have moved to have the case dismissed.)

Another set of wiretaps suggests the degree to which Berlusconi controlled RAI while out of office, despite being the principal owner of its main competitor, Mediaset. RAI hired Deborah Bergamini, Berlusconi's former personal assistant, to be the director of marketing. In 2007, it was reported that Bergamini was functioning essentially as a kind of Mediaset agent inside the state TV system. She was frequently on the phone with her former colleagues at Mediaset, coördinating programs and discussing how news events should be handled. In one 2005 conversation, she discussed how to minimize coverage of the death of the Pope, in order not to depress the Catholic vote in regional elections that were about to take place. When the election went badly for Berlusconi's center-right coalition, Bergamini and her colleagues worked mightily to delay broadcasting the results as long as possible, until the audience dropped off, and then made the announcement in as confusing a fashion as possible. Bergamini was let go from RAI after the conversations became public, but was given nearly six hundred thousand dollars in severance. (She denies any collusion with Mediaset.) Today, she, too, sits in parliament.

Before leaving office in 2006, Berlusconi passed a new electoral law that gave party leaders almost total power over who could run for parliament. In the past, voters could vote for individual candidates, giving power to local politicians with a following in their home districts. Under the new rules, Italians can vote only for a party, and the party bosses draw up the electoral lists. Those at the top of the list have the greatest chance of getting elected, and candidates' chances diminish the farther down they are placed. Members of parliament serve at the pleasure of the party leader. "I'm like Prince Charming—they were pumpkins and I turned them into parliamentarians," Berlusconi once said of his parliamentary delegation. The law also contained a "prize" for the party winning a majority in parliament: a number of extra seats to provide security for the governing coalition.

During a recent legislative session, Berlusconi proposed that only the party leaders should bother to vote in parliament, making the role of all but a handful of the six hundred and thirty members purely ceremonial. "We are moving toward a kind of South American model of democracy," Bruno Tabacci, who is a former Christian Democrat, a member of the Old Guard, and hardly a political radical, says. Now in the opposition, he served in Berlusconi's center-right coalition between 2001 and 2006. Even then, he points out, he voted against criminal-justice laws that appeared designed specifically to benefit Berlusconi and his co-defendants. Such internal dissent under the new rules is inconceivable, Tabacci says. "Members of parliament are essentially appointed, not elected, now. The role of parliament has become moribund." Gerardo D'Ambrosio, a center-left senator who spent more than forty years as a judge before entering politics, was even blunter. Because of Berlusconi's habit of cutting off debate on important legislation by calling for simple votes of confidence, "Parliament has become a farce," he said.

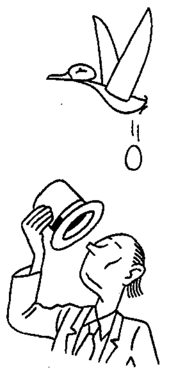
How farcical became clear early in the new session, when a photographer with a telephoto lens captured the text of a note that Berlusconi sent to two young female deputies, Gabriella Giammanco and Nunzia De Girolamo, on the Chamber floor:

> Gabri, Nunzia, you look great together! Thanks for staying here, but it's not necessary. If you have some romantic appointment at lunchtime, I authorize you to *leave!... Many kisses to both of you!!!* "Your" president.

The photographer also captured the beginning of their response:

> Dear [President], we accept romantic appointments only from you.

Five years ago, Berlusconi saw a pretty twenty-three-year-old TV news reader named Virginia Sanjust di Teulada deliver a report about one of his economic decrees. The next day, he sent her a lavish bouquet of flowers with a note of congratulations. She replied with a thank-you note that included her cell-phone number. The next thing she knew, the Prime Minister was on the line, inviting her to lunch at the ministerial palace. She accepted. After lunch, according to an account by her ex-husband, Federico Armati, Berlusconi allegedly gave her a diamond bracelet and offered her a two-and-a-half-month consultancy at the Prime Minister's office, which paid about fifty thousand dollars. This was done with a formal ministerial decree, which was withdrawn suddenly when the press heard about it. But Sanjust subsequently got her own TV show on RAI



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and her ex-husband, who worked for the country's intelligence services, got a highly desirable transfer; then, after he and his ex-wife became embroiled in a custody battle, Armati was demoted.

Berlusconi's lawyers insist that he did nothing wrong and was only helping a young woman in need. Sanjust's lawyers also deny any wrongdoing. As with the conversation with Saccà, we will probably never know whether or not Berlusconi broke the law in this case, thanks to the legislation his lawyers pushed through parliament giving the Prime Minister immunity from prosecution while in office.

Armati, like any good member of the intelligence services, had documented his former wife's dealings with Berlusconi for possible future use. He claimed that Sanjust used her influence with Berlusconi to have him transferred and his pay slashed. (He was reassigned to a low-level job at a courthouse and his pay was reduced from about seven thousand dollars a month to a meagre twenty-five hundred. When Armati threatened to expose Berlusconi's dealings with his ex-wife, he says that he was suddenly given another position, with a salary of around eight thousand dollars a month.) Armati put together his version of events in a denunciation that he submitted to the *tribunale dei ministri*, which oversees misconduct at a ministerial level.

Armati also insists that Berlusconi gave his ex-wife considerable sums in cash—something that Berlusconi's lawyers deny, insisting that their relationship was purely one of friendship.

Although there is no documentation for the alleged cash payments, arrangements appear to have been made for Sanjust to live in an apartment overlooking the Campo de' Fiori, one of Rome's most beautiful squares, where Armati had previously lived. The official buyer was Salvatore Sciascia, who was the chief financial officer of Berlusconi's company Fininvest. He had been convicted of bribing members of the Italian tax police on Berlusconi's behalf. (He says that he has since been "rehabilitated.") Instead of firing Sciascia for his role in the bribery affair, Berlusconi brought him into the Senate, where he is one of several senators who have been convicted of serious crimes.

That none of this troubles the Italian public, which says a lot about the center-left opposition Berlusconi faces. "The real drama here is not the sex farce but the total collapse and fragmentation of the center-left," a friend of mine says. Berlusconi—despite two previous lacklustre terms in office—was reëlected this year because of the failures of the aborted eighteen-month center-left Prodi government. With its one-vote majority in the Senate, a fractured nine-party coalition that couldn't agree on anything important, the Prodi government was unable to address any of the country's important issues, including a protracted garbage crisis in Naples. As a result, a majority of the Italian people were happy to grant Berlusconi an extraordinary amount of decision-making power. He immediately eliminated the property tax on all Italians' principal residence, and the move was highly popular. Calling in the Army, he acted quickly to get the garbage off the streets of Naples, and claimed to have restored the city to the Western world in a mere fifty-eight days.

"I'm looking for someone to do my part to make this a better world."

The larger fact remains that Italy has declined seriously during the fourteen years that Berlusconi has dominated Italian politics. Crony capitalism has proved to be inefficient as well as corrupt. In the early nineteen-nineties, Italy's G.D.P. was about fifteen per cent larger than that of Great Britain; now its economy is twenty-three per cent lower. When Wall Street collapsed and the current international financial crisis swept Europe, Berlusconi urged his countrymen not to hide their money under the mattress but to keep buying stocks—he recommended Mediaset, among others—and to keep spending. To set an example, he headed off to a disco, telling the crowd there, according to the Rome daily *La Repubblica*, "If I sleep for three hours, I still have enough energy to make love for another three." The financial catastrophe has only increased his power, since as Prime Minister he will undoubtedly have control over public monies allocated for private corporate bailouts.

Even the rampant sexism of Berlusconi's behavior toward women in politics—the use of women as political arm candy—is not without economic consequences. Italy has the smallest percentage of women in the workplace of any major European nation—a serious drag on economic growth and productivity that helps explain why the country has lagged at the bottom among industrialized nations. A recent study by the Bank of Italy showed that if employment levels among Italy's women were the same as those among men the country's G.D.P. would be seventeen per cent higher. Other studies link Italy's birth rate, among the lowest in the world, to the extreme asymmetry between men and women in Italy. That is unlikely to be cured by the royal touch. ♦

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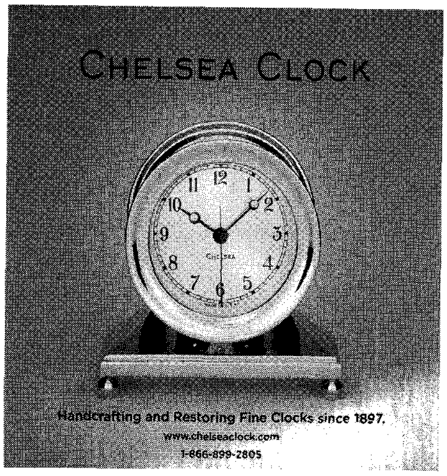
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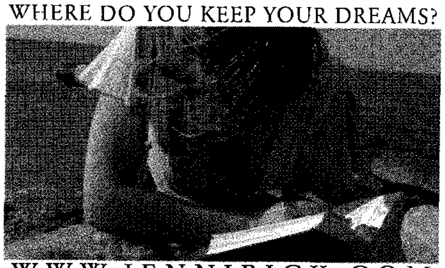
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ANNALS OF TECHNOLOGY

THE GRAMMAR OF FUN

CliffyB and the world of the video game.

BY TOM BISSELL

Epic Games is a privately owned company and does not disclose its earnings. But on a Monday morning in late April, while standing in Epic's parking lot, at Crossroads Corporate Park, in Cary, North Carolina, awaiting the arrival of Cliff Bleszinski, the company's thirty-three-year-old design director, I realized that my surroundings were their own sort of Nasdaq. Ten feet away was a red Hummer H3. Nearby was a Lotus Elise, and next to it a pumpkin-orange Porsche. Many of the cars had personalized plates: "PS3CODER" (a reference to Sony's PlayStation3), "EPICBOY," "GRSOFWAR."

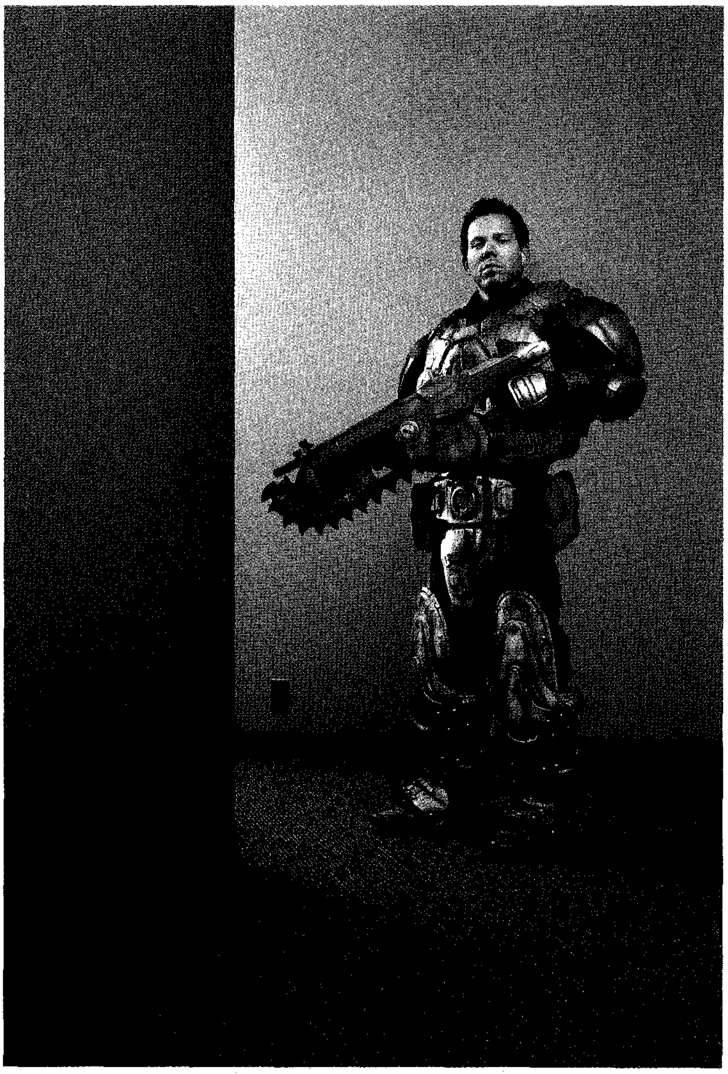
The last is shorthand for Gears of War, a shooter game, which Epic released in November, 2006, for play on Microsoft's Xbox 360 console. Gears of War was quickly recognized as the first game to provide the sensually overwhelming experience for which the console, launched a year earlier, had been designed. Gears won virtually every available industry award, and was the 360's best-selling game for nearly a year; it has now sold five million copies. On November 7th, a sequel, Gears of War 2, will be released; its development, long rumored, was not confirmed until this past February, when, at the Game Developers' Conference, in San Francisco, Bleszinski made the announcement after bursting through an onstage partition wielding a replica of one of Gears of War's signature weapons—an assault rifle mounted with a chainsaw bayonet.

Despite the rapid growth of the video-game industry—last year, sales were higher than either box-office receipts or DVD sales—designers are largely invisible within the wider culture. But Bleszinski, who is known to his many fans and occasional detractors as CliffyB, tends to stand out among his colleagues. Heather Chaplin and Aaron Ruby's "Smartbomb," a book about the industry, recounts the peacockish outfits and hair styles he has showcased at industry expos over the years. In 2001, he affected the stylings of a twenty-first-century Tom Wolfe, with white snakeskin shoes and bleached hair. In 2002, he took to leather jackets and an early-Clooney Caesar cut. By 2003, he was wearing long fur-lined coats, his hair skater-punk red. In recent years, he let his hair grow shaggy, which gave him the mellow aura of a fourth Bee Gee.

Bleszinski drove into Epic's parking lot in a red Lamborghini Gallardo Spyder, the top down despite an impending rainstorm. His current haircut is short and cowlicked, his bangs twirled up into a tiny moussed horn. He was wearing what in my high school would have been called "exchange-student jeans"—obviously expensive but slightly the wrong color and of a somehow non-American cut. Beneath a tight, fashionably out-of-style black nylon jacket was a T-shirt that read "TECHNOLOGY!" His sunglasses were of the oversized, county-sheriff variety, and each of his earlobes held a small, bright diamond earring. He could have been either a boyish Dolce & Gabbana model or a small-town weed dealer.

Bleszinski suggested that we go to a local diner. He professes an aversion to mornings, and to Monday mornings especially, but he seemed dauntingly alert. "This car's like a wakeup call," he said. "By the time I get to work, my heart's pumping and I'm ready to crank." Before we were even out of the parking lot, we were travelling at forty-five miles an hour. At a stoplight, Bleszinski exchanged waves with the driver of an adjacent red Ferrari—another Epic employee. When we hit a hundred miles per hour on a highway entrance ramp, Bleszinski announced, "Never got one ticket!" On the highway, he slowed to seventy-five. "One of my jobs in life," Bleszinski said, cutting over to an exit, "is to make this look a little cooler." By "this," he meant his job.

Bleszinski's brand of mild outrageousness—the "Cliffycam" on his blog page, which, some years ago, allowed visitors to observe him online while he worked; the photographs of him on his MySpace page alongside the splatter-film director Eli Roth and the porn stars Jenna Jameson and Ron Jeremy—qualifies him as exceptional in an industry that is, as he says, widely assumed to be a preserve inhabited by pale, withdrawn, molelike creatures. There is some truth to this stereotype: most game designers are not like CliffyB. But neither, really, is Bleszinski. The nickname, he told me, was bestowed on him by some "jock kid," when he was a small, shy teen-ager, and was meant as a taunt. Bleszinski took the name and fashioned a tougher persona around it, but, after spending a little time with him, one has the sensation of watching someone observing himself. Video games are founded upon such complicated transference. Gamers are allowed, for a time, all manner of ontological assumptions. They can also terminate their assumed personalities whenever they wish, and, lately, Bleszinski has been asking game-industry journalists if they might not "sit on" the CliffyB moniker "for a while."


Cliff Bleszinski at Epic Games's offices. Photograph by Phil Toledano.

Bleszinski was born in Boston, in 1975, eleven years to the day after the birth of his oldest brother, Greg. His father, whom Bleszinski describes as a "very stressed-out guy," was an engineer for Polaroid. The Bleszinskis were a close family. His mother, Karyn, told me, "We always sat down at the dinner table together. That was always important to my husband and me." One of Bleszinski's earliest and strongest memories is the smell of popcorn spreading thickly throughout the house after he had gone to bed, which convinced him that his "parents were having a great time and throwing a party" without him. In truth, this was merely his father's pre-bedtime ritual: over this nightly bowl of popcorn he would often melt an entire stick of butter. In 1990, when Bleszinski was fifteen, his forty-seven-year-old father died when an aortic aneurysm ruptured while he was golfing. Bleszinski still remembers what game he was playing when he learned of his father's death: the Nintendo game Blaster Master. He never played it again.

"He took it very hard," Karyn told me. She described Bleszinski as her "unique child," noting that he was "the most difficult, but he was difficult because he was the most inquisitive. He'd take apart whatever you got for him." After her husband's death, Karyn moved the family to the Los Angeles suburbs, where she worked as a restaurant manager. In 1991, she bought a computer for her son. "I'm not that technical of a guy," Bleszinski told me. "I started off programming my own games and doing the art for them, but I was a crappy coder and a crappier artist. But I didn't want to let that stop me. I was going to kick and scream and claw my way into the business any way possible." He thinks that it was perhaps only the death of his father that allowed him to do this. "If he hadn't passed, he probably would have made me go to Northeastern and become an engineer," he said.

In 1992, a year after Bleszinski had taught himself the rudiments of computer programming, he sent a game submission to Tim Sweeney, the twenty-two-year-old C.E.O. of Epic Megagames, who had recently dropped out of a mechanical-engineering program at the University of Maryland. (Epic's original name, Sweeney told me, was "a big scam" to make it look legitimate. "When you're this one single person in your parents' garage trying to start a company, you want to look like you're really big," he said.) Sweeney still remembers Bleszinski's submission, a P.C. game called Dare to Dream, in which a boy gets trapped, appropriately enough, inside his own dreamworld. "At that time," Sweeney said, "we'd gotten sixty or seventy game submissions from different people and we went ahead with five of them, and Cliff was one of the best." Once his game was in development, Bleszinski became more involved with the company. Sweeney aid, "We'd have four or five different projects in development with different teams, and every time one started to reach completion we'd send it off to Cliff, and he'd write off his big list of what's good about this game and what needs to be fixed. Cliff's lists kept growing bigger and bigger." Bleszinski was only seventeen. When I asked Sweeney if he had had any reservations about entrusting his company's fate to a teen-ager whose driver's-license lamination was still warm, Sweeney said, "That's what the industry was like."

Upon its release, Dare to Dream, in

"I'd vote for her, but Election Day is the opening of moose season."

• •

Bleszinski's words, "bombed." His second game for Epic, released a year later, featured what he calls a "Rambo rabbit" named Jazz, who carried a large gun and hunted frenetically for intergalactic treasure. Jazz Jackrabbit, which imported to a P.C. platform innovations previously exclusive to Sega and Nintendo consoles, made Bleszinski's reputation. Epic had begun as a company churning out somewhat rechauffé fare—pinball simulators, clone-ish retreads, an uninspired but popular game known as Unreal Tournament. It was Bleszinski, in no small part, who filled Epic's parking lot with sports cars.

At the diner, I asked Bleszinski which games had most influenced him. Super Mario Brothers, he said, "is where it really kicked into high gear." Indeed, the first issue of *Nintendo Power*, published in 1988, listed the high scores of a handful of Super Mario devotees, the thirteen-year-old Bleszinski's among them. "There's something about the whole hidden element to Mario, where you jump and hit your head on a block and just out of nowhere secret things would appear," Bleszinski said. "They made you feel like a kid in the woods."

Issued in 1985, Super Mario Brothers was a game of summer-vacation-consuming scope and unprecedented inventiveness. It was among the first video games to suggest that it might contain a world. It was also hallucinogenically strange. Why did mushrooms make Mario grow larger? Why did flowers give Mario the ability to spit fire? Why did bashing Mario's head against bricks sometimes produce coins? And why was Mario's enemy, Bowser, a saurian, spiky-shelled turtle?

In film and literature, such surrealistic fantasy typically occurs at the outer edge of experimentalism, but early video games depended on symbols for the simple reason that the technological limitations of the time made realism impossible. Mario, for instance, wore a porkpie hat not for aesthetic reasons but because hair was too difficult to render. Bleszinski retains affection for many older games, but he says, "If you go back and play the majority of old games, they really aren't very good." He suspects that what made them seem so good at the time was the imaginative involvement of players: "You wanted to believe, you wanted to fill in the gaps."

Games like Gears of War, which offer literal representations of what the gamer "sees" and "does," differ so profoundly from a game like Super Mario Brothers that they appear to share as many commonalities as a trilobite does with a Great Dane. The new games fill in *all* the gaps, and they have also done away with many of the symbolic prerequisites of video-game play, such as the number of "lives" a player has, the score, health bars, and so on. In Gears, there is no score. The player gets a single life; if it is forfeited, one must start again at the nearest passed checkpoint. The health bar is invisible; the only indication of one's injury status is a gradually reddening icon, known as the Crimson Omen. Super Mario requires an ability to recognize patterns, considerable hand-eye coördination, and quick reflexes. Gears requires the ability to think tactically and make subtle judgments based on scant information, a constant awareness of multiple variables (ammunition stores, enemy weaknesses) as they change throughout the game, and the spatial sensitivity to control one's movement through a space in which the "right" direction is not always apparent. Anyone who plays modern games such as Gears does not so much learn the rules as develop a kind of intuition for how the game operates. Often, there is no single way to accomplish a given task; improvisation is rewarded. Older games, like Super Mario, punish improvisation: you live or die according to their algebra alone.

Gears is largely the story of a soldier, Marcus Fenix, who, as the game begins, has been imprisoned for abandoning his comrades (who are known as COGs, or Gears) in order to save his father, who dies before Fenix can reach him. He is released because a fourteen-year war with a tunnel-using alien army known as the Locusts has depleted the human army's ranks. This much we learn in the first two minutes of the game; the next ten hours or so are an ingeniously paced march through frequent and elaborately staged firefights with Locusts, Wretches, Dark Wretches, Corpsers, Boomers, three blind and terrifying Berserkers, and the vile General Raam. Along the way, players can treat themselves to the singular experience of using the chainsaw bayonets on their Lancer assault rifles to cut their enemies in half, during which the in-game camera is gleefully splashed with blood. (Gears is one of the most violent games ever made, but Bleszinski maintains that it contains "very much a laughable kind of violence," like "watching a melon explode in a Gallagher show." Still, one act of violence in Gears 2 is intimate and upsetting enough to have given one of the designers pause, until Bleszinski and others convinced him that the act grew out of a necessary dramatic trajectory.)

The story line and the narrative dilemmas of Gears are not very sophisticated. What is sophisticated about Gears is its mood. The world in which the action takes place is a kind of destroyed utopia; its architecture, weapons, and characters are chunky and oversized but, somehow, never cartoonish. Most video-game worlds, however well conceived, are essenceless. Gears felt dirty and inhabited, and everything from the mechanics of its gameplay to its elliptical backstory was forcefully conceived, giving it an experiential depth rare in the genre.

The novelist Nathan Englander, a fan of the game, cites its third-person viewpoint, in which the player looks over the shoulder of the character being controlled, as a key to its success. "In literary terms," Englander told me, "it's a close-second-person shooter. It's Jay McInerney and Lorrie Moore territory. You're both totally involved and totally watching." As for the collapsed architecture and blown-open spaces of the Gears world, Englander said, "There's the hospital from 'Blindness' and the house from 'The Ghost Writer,' and I know that beautiful, ruined world of Gears as well as either of those."

Much of the resonance of Gears can be directly attributed to the character of Fenix. Video-game characters tend to be emptily iconic. Pac-Man, for instance, is some sort of notionally symbolic being. Mario (who was originally known only as Jumpman) is merely the vessel of the player's desired task. Halo's Master Chief is notable mainly for his golden-visored unknowableness. Fenix, encased within armor so thick that his arms and legs resemble hydrants, his head covered by a black bandanna, and his eyes as tiny as BBs, is different. He shows constant caution and, occasionally, fear. Although he can dive gracefully, his normal gait has the lumbering heaviness of an abandoned herd animal. His face is badly scarred, and his voice (excellently rendered by the actor John DiMaggio, who also provided the voice of Bender on Matt Groening's "Futurama") is a three-packs-a-day growl, less angry than exhausted. Unlike the protagonists of many shooters, Fenix rarely seems particularly eager to kill anything. The advertising campaign for the first Gears was centered on a strangely affecting sixty-second spot in which Fenix twice flees from enemies, only to be cornered by a Corpser, a monstrous arachnoid creature, on which he opens fire. But it was the soundtrack—Gary Jules's spare, mournful cover of the 1982 Tears for Fears song "Mad World"—that gave the spot its harsh-tender dissonance. This helped signal that Fenix was something that few video-game characters had yet managed to be: disappointedly adult.

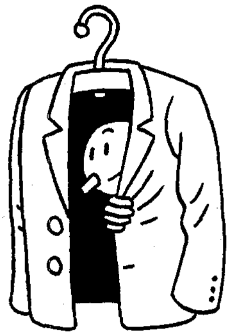
When I asked about the melancholy at the core of Gears, Bleszinski said, "I was never geeky enough for the geeks and I was never cool enough for the cool people. I've always been in that weird purgatory." That slight feeling of identity crisis persists. A few years ago, Bleszinski divorced his high-school sweetheart. "I woke up one day, and had the two Labs, and the house in the suburbs, and I'm, like, What the hell am I doing here?" he told me. His mother told me that she loves watching him introduce his games on YouTube. "I can also tell he's nervous, but only a mother would know that," she said.

Bleszinski admitted that much of Gears is, in its way, autobiographical. Its look and its aesthetic, for example, were influenced by his first trip to London, where he climbed to the top of St. Paul's Cathedral and, with "a shitty little camera," snapped a picture of a yolky sun setting over the Thames, the sky streaked with nursery blues and pinks. Bleszinski's London photograph is one of the reasons that much of Gears takes place in twilight—a lighting condition prized by cinematographers but comparatively neglected in video games. Bleszinski asked his artists to create a "sci-fi" hybrid of London and Washington, D.C., but advised them to keep the futuristic well balanced with the historical. The big flaw in most depictions of the future, he says, "is that they always forget to leave in the past. Everyone always assumes that the entire world would just explode and be rebuilt in this kind of super-futuristic style. I still see old cars from the thirties and forties around, right next to things that look like they're from the year 2000. It's that mix that makes things interesting."

Gears also contains what Bleszinski calls a "going home" narrative: "There's a sublevel to Gears that so many people missed out on because it's such a big testosterone-filled chainsaw-fest. Marcus Fenix goes back to his childhood home in the game. I dream about my house in Boston, basically every other night. It was up on a hill." In Gears of War, the fatherless Fenix's manse is on a hill, too, and getting to its front door involves some of the most harried and ridiculously frantic fighting in the game. When I told Bleszinski that Fenix's homecoming was one of my favorite levels in Gears, he asked if I knew where its title, "Imaginary Place," had come from. I thought for a moment. Earlier, he had made a nicely observed reference to the novelist Cormac McCarthy, and I was attuned to the possibility of an altogether unexpected window into his imagination. Was it from Auden? No. It was a reference to a line from Zach Braff's film "Garden State," in which "family" is defined as "a group of people who miss the same imaginary place." When you start to peel back the layers of the Gears world, Bleszinski told me, "there's a lot of sadness there."

In addition to the prevailing mood of wistful savagery, the singularity of Gears of War resides in what designers describe as its "feel"—the way that the game's mechanics are orchestrated to create both a compelling experience for the player and the illusion of an internally consistent world. The importance of this sensation is something that Bleszinski has made his special focus and passion. "I'm looking for a fun core-loop of what you're doing for thirty seconds over and over again," he told me. "I want it to grab me quick and fast. I want it to have an interesting game mechanic, but I also want it to be a fascinating universe that I want to spend time in, because you're spending often dozens of hours in this universe." Rod Fergusson, an Epic senior producer who, with Bleszinski, oversees the continuity of the Gears universe, told me that Bleszinski is "a designer by feel" who conceives of games in "big picture" terms "yet tweaks the smallest things." He told me, "If you look at people who tried to copy Gears's mechanics, they don't have that guy doing that hands-on, touchy-feely way of designing. They kind of get the broad strokes, but they don't get the little detaily things."

An example of this is Gears's famous "cover" system, an innovation of Bleszinski's, which demands that the player move with chesslike care and efficiency around the battle space, using walls, doorways, barricades, and the scorched husks of vehicles as cover. Bleszinski told me that a paintball match had impressed upon him the ludicrousness of how most shooters operated, with players running around in the open, strafing their enemies and jumping to avoid being shot. "Getting hit by a paintball freaking hurts like hell," he said. It occurred to him that a shooter based on the idea of taking cover would be a more realistic and primal experience. A 2003 game called kill.switch was the first game to attempt a cover system, but Bleszinski streamlined and augmented the concept. In Gears, an exposed player is actively punished by the game, as the damage inflicted by enemy bullets and explosives spikes nastily whenever cover is abandoned. Bleszinski became fixated on making sure that, when cover is taken, the right amount of dust is kicked up against the controlled character's back and that the character's grunt has just the right timbre and volume. In this way, the reward for seeking cover becomes subliminally sensory.



The most frequently imitated aspect of Gears is a feature known as the "roadie run," so named for the crouch into which a player's hustling character lowers himself, and which Bleszinski thought resembled a rock-show roadie's attempt to move discreetly across the stage. While in roadie-run mode, the in-game camera goes jitteringly handheld and fish-eyed and sinks into a miasma of dust. It is difficult to see exactly where one is going, and the over-all effect is that of intense panic. Bleszinski calls it "the Falluja follow-cam," and likens it to the viewpoint of an embedded journalist. Yet in roadie run the player is travelling only one and a half times faster than normal. The feature is both a brilliant distortion of perspective and a cunning approximation of the confusion of combat.

When a tech company begins to refer to its headquarters as a "campus," a certain threshold of success has been attained. Microsoft and Google both have campuses that rival those of many academic institutions. Epic is still a small company, relatively speaking, but it recently bought a neighboring lot and will soon begin construction of another building, which will make it, in tech-industry terms, an official "campus." Already, it has a gym, a large motion-capture studio for its in-game animation, a small arcade, a basketball court, and a walk-in closet filled with free snacks and drinks whose total caloric worth must be somewhere in the low millions.

The Epic offices display a kind of low-key egalitarianism. None of the parking spaces are reserved, there are no cubicles, and window and corner offices have been somewhat heedlessly assigned. I glimpsed one Epic employee, who appeared to be, roughly, twelve years old, typing away at his desk in a window office, while Gears's senior producer and the company's senior gameplay designer toiled in small, windowless rooms. Bleszinski himself shares his office with two other Epic employees.

If one were to commission a very bright and unusually tasteful adolescent to design his ideal workplace, Epic's headquarters would probably be the result. Its many blacks, grays, and corrugated-metal surfaces might best be labelled Bachelor Futurist, even though, by now, most of Epic's male employees wear wedding rings. The office furnishings come in three styles: Neo-Living Room (easy-rocking, lever-activated recliners), Casual Satanist (black leather couches), and Romper Room Gothic (beanbag chairs). The aroma of lingering adolescence carries over into the mementos, knickknacks, and emblems that Epic's employees use to decorate their offices. Tim Sweeney, with the earnestness of a teen-age boy, has a prominent Ferrari flag hanging in his office—though Sweeney, unlike most teen-age boys, actually owns a Ferrari. Chris Perna, the art director of Gears 2, displays on one of the shelves in his office a foot-high silver-cast Darth Vader Pez dispenser. Bleszinski's office resembles a toy-store yard sale. These are boyish affectations, certainly, but boyishness is the realm in which these men seek inspiration, not a code by which they live.

A Microsoft employee who works closely with Epic described the company as having a "band dynamic." Staff turnover is low, and many of Epic's most senior employees have been friends for more than a decade. This does not seem a very long time until one sits in on an Epic meeting and realizes that anyone over the age of thirty-five achieves the temporal stature of Methuselah. Epic's recent growth is regarded with wary gratitude by many of its employees, though some miss the old days, when, as Sweeney put it, "we were just a bunch of kids who had some cool ideas and were doing neat things."

When surrounded by his colleagues and discussing the gravities of gameplay, Bleszinski discards his self-consciously laid-back manner, and the precision of his gaming mind quickly becomes apparent. A colleague told me that Bleszinski's "huge strength is his basic ability to just get it—pick something up and give you a one-minute usability report."

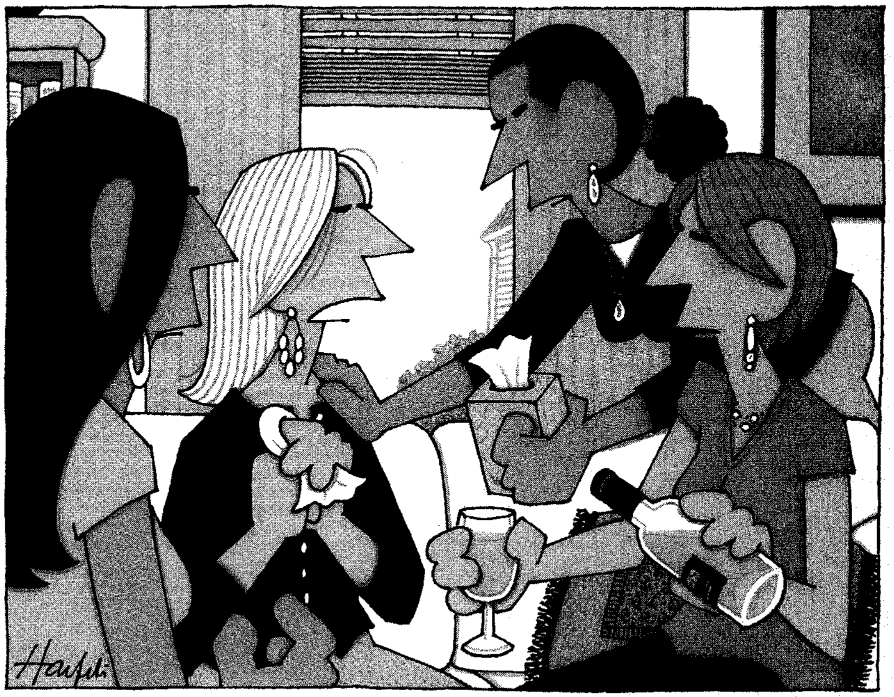
It is unusual for any game company to allow an outsider access to its meetings, for fear of the game's features being prematurely disclosed. While discussing Gears 2's new "crowd" system, which will allow an unprecedented number of individually functioning enemies to flock across the battle space, Bleszinski mentioned how excited he was to open fire upon them with a certain weapon. Within minutes, I was pulled aside by a Microsoft representative and informed that this weapon's existence would not be confirmed until later in the summer and could I please refrain from mentioning it. The gaming media is largely made up of obsessive enthusiasts, and the carefully planned release of information tantalizes them with the promise of insider knowledge. "How do you reach the core?" Jeff Bell, who used to oversee global marketing for Microsoft's interactive-entertainment division, asked me. "How?" I asked. "Secrets," he said, his eyes sparkling in the manner of a supervillain announcing his plan to poison the Eastern Seaboard's water supply. The game industry is more or less leakproof, and possesses a strange kind of innocence: it guards its secrets as guilelessly as a boy might hide from his mother—but not from his brother and sister—the extraterrestrial living in his bedroom.

I was warned, before attending a play-through of one of Gears 2's unfinished levels, that it was still "janky." Although the level was fully voice-acted, it was only partially scored, and many sound effects had yet to be added. Some of the virtual lighting was not yet functional, and the onscreen Fenix flickered. From time to time, the game crashed altogether. Nonetheless, we watched the level's lead designer guide Fenix through what looked to be an enthusiastically mortared office building. Ahead, in the shadows, numerous monsters scrambled—the goosebumpy Gears warning that a violent engagement was somewhere ahead. By the third iteration of this, Bleszinski was shaking his head: "Enough monster foreplay." When Fenix and a comrade had to walk a bomb to a door in need of obliteration, Bleszinski said that they should be moving "ten to fifteen per cent faster." When the play-through was complete, he said that too much of the level involved going into one room to hit a switch that activated a door in another. The otherwise superlative Grand Theft Auto series is particularly afflicted with this mouse-coaxed-through-a-maze problem, and Bleszinski's only complaint about the G.T.A. games, which he admires, is that they can sometimes "feel like work." This emphasis on making players aware of why they were choosing certain paths without being reminded that their choice was essentially illusory recalled the "vivid and continuous dream" that John Gardner once spoke of concerning fiction.

In a discussion of another level of the game, known as "Hospital," Bleszinski, sitting by himself on a long couch, wondered if, in the online multiplayer version of the level, which pits players against each other, a building's sprinkler system could be used to extinguish the pilot light of an opponent's flamethrower. "Wouldn't that be cool?" he asked. A similar moment resulted in one of Gears 1's most notorious features. One day, late in the game's production, Bleszinski expressed his frustration at having to finish off downed enemies by shooting them. "You know," he said, "I just want to stomp on his head!" From this came the game's gratuitously fatal coup de grâce: the "curb stomp," whereby a player crushes his opponent's skull beneath the anvil of an enormous metal boot. Rod Fergusson later told me, "I wouldn't be surprised if, in the next two weeks, there's a hallway with a sprinkler system that puts out the pilot light of the flamethrower."

Discussion at Epic is collegial and to the point; modern game design is too complex and collaborative for any individual to feel proprietary about his own ideas. At one meeting I attended, a disagreement about weaponry was swiftly resolved. "There's no direct counter to the flamethrower," Ray Davis, the game's lead programmer, pointed out, with exasperation. A colleague, who had obviously heard this before, sighed. "I don't know. I think it's a superweapon," he said. Then someone else observed that the boomshot, another devastatingly fatal weapon, had no direct counter, either, and Davis recognized with a grin that his argument had been destroyed. Bleszinski took the opportunity to raise a singular annoyance of the boomshot, familiar to anyone with experience of the multiplayer version of Gears: the impossibility of knowing whether someone you are charging toward happens to be carrying it. "The boomshot needs something to warn you your opponent's got it," Bleszinski said. He suggested adding small glowing lights around its four barrels, which everyone agreed was a fine solution. Davis, who works most directly with the programmers and was therefore most familiar with what remained janky, brought up the "inconsistent, unfun lethality" of a certain kind of grenade. This segued into Gears 2's inclusion of ink grenades, which create a highly damaging toxic cloud—the proper gameplay use of which no one, so far, had been able to decide.

Until very recently, almost no literature was devoted to game design, and what there was tended to be quickly made obsolete by the speed of technological developments. After the day's final meeting had ended, I realized that, for the two decades that I had been playing games, I had unwittingly been at the mercy of the constantly changing orthodoxies of game design. I knew that some



"But I'm sure he loves me. He wouldn't be able to withhold love if he didn't love me."

games seemed more fun than others, but I would have struggled to explain why. Bleszinski and the other Epic designers came to this form as children. Growing up playing games, they absorbed the governing logic of the medium, but no institutions existed for them to transform what they learned into a methodology. Gradually, though, they turned a hobby into a creative profession that is now as complex as any other. They have established the principles of a grammar of fun.

Before leaving Epic, I was invited to take part in the daily playtest, which occupies an hour or two of every afternoon. That day, the team was testing the multiplayer modes of Gears 2. Games that feature multiplayer options have proved to be the Xbox 360's most popular, a fact that is easily explained. One of the most common criticisms of video games is that they can wrap those who play in enforced and occasionally deranging solitude. But to take part in a multiplayer game is to give a game new life every time one plays, because one is matched against human players, whose ingenuity and fallibility no computer can hope to equal, and because one can exchange with one's fellow-players advice, taunts, and congratulations. A dozen Epic employees gathered in the test lab and signed in to the individual consoles that lined the walls. The battle would pit one side of the room against the other. I was assigned my slot and selected my avatar—a Drone Locust.

Testing is among the more consuming aspects of modern game design. I was told that Gears 2 would be subject to roughly forty thousand hours of testing before its release. This is an impressive number—until one realizes that the first forty thousand people who buy and play Gears 2 will, in one hour, equal that amount of testing. Gears 1 was released with a few bugs—instances in which the game behaves in a way that was not intended—a fact that many at Epic remain bitterly embarrassed about, even though it is nearly impossible to completely eliminate bugs from any game. Testing of multiplayer modes involves something more sociological than purely technical assessment: learning what tendencies a given environment fosters. If there are places to hide, they must always have a fatal weakness. If a particularly powerful weapon is hidden somewhere, it must be difficult and risky to reach. If a large number of players are being killed at a certain location, the game designers must ask themselves why, and decide whether to correct for this. The aim is to eliminate all ineradicable advantages, but this goal is seldom attained. Two weeks after the release of Gears 1, Bleszinski told me, "I'd go online and get completely destroyed by everybody."

In our first multiplayer game, which was called Guardian, one had to kill the opposing team's leader and all those who protect him. By the end, a teammate and I happened to be the only survivors (I achieved this status largely by hiding), and we encountered Bleszinski crouching behind a stack of sandbags. We decided to charge. Bleszinski popped out from cover and, with a shotgun, expertly exploded the head of my teammate before beating me to death as I rounded the edge of his hiding place. Bleszinski ended the game with twenty-one kills; I had three.

The next contest, then known as Meat-flag but since renamed, amounted to a game of capture the flag—though the flag was, bracingly, a human being. In this match, I was simultaneously chainsawed to death by three people, a spectacle that everyone in the room claimed never to have seen before, in all their hours of play. Our final game was called Wingman, which is played in pairs. Bleszinski and I buddied up, and I shouted across the room to him for some general guidance. "Basically," he said, "kill anyone who doesn't look like you. Our foreign policy."

I fared miserably again, and pride compelled me to point out that I had beaten Gears 1 on its most challenging difficulty level. No one was listening, and Bleszinski stood up. "Now's the fun part," he said. "Figure out what's a bug and what's not a bug." He conferred in a huddle with the other designers about what to enter into the defect-tracking database. "You tell people what you do for a living," Bleszinski said later, "and they're like, 'Oh, you play video games for a living.' No, I play a game that's not as fun as it should be, that's broken, until it's no longer broken. Then I give it to other people to have fun with." ♦

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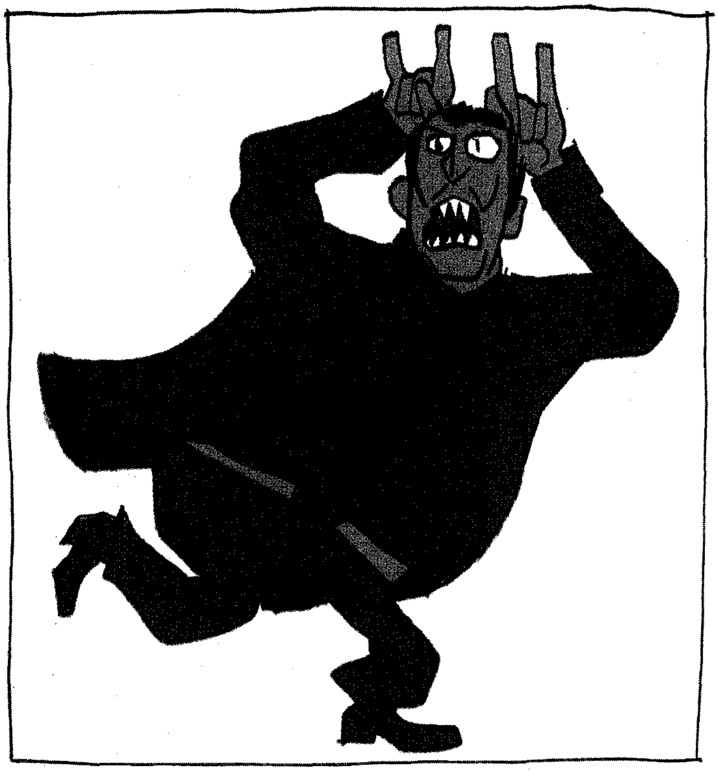
FICTION

THE FAT MAN'S RACE

BY LOUISE ERDRICH

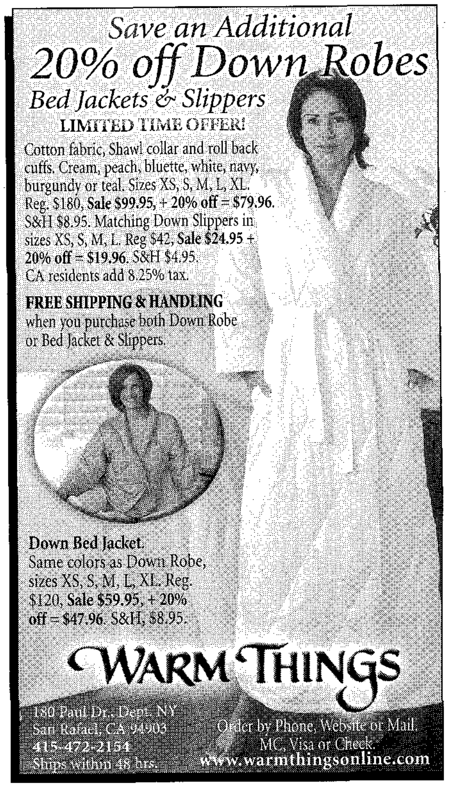


TODD JAMES

I was in love with a man named Cuthbert, Grandma Ignatia said, and, Oh, that man could really eat. He would sit down to the table with a haunch of venison, a whole chicken, two or three gullet breads or a bucket of bangs, half a dozen ears of corn or a bag of raw carrots. He'd eat the whole lot, then go out and work in the field. He was very big, but he was also stone solid—muscle, not fat. He'd grab me up and set me on his lap and talk to me in Michif. He'd call me his *peti' shoo.* I was going to marry Cuthbert and had the date of the wedding all picked out, when his sisters tried to turn him against me. They told him that I was after his money, that I wanted his land, and also that I was having sex with the Devil.

Only the last part was true.

Our priest had warned that each of us has two angels: one is a guardian, and the other is an angel of perversion. That second angel will attempt to convince you that it is the first, he said, and I suppose I fell for it. I was visited at night in my dreams by a man in blue—a blue suit, a blue shirt, a blue tie, blue shoes, but no hat. He had black hair and black eyes, skin the color of a pale-brown egg, very smooth and markless. He would take off all his blue clothes and lay them at my feet. His instrument of pleasure—don't laugh at me—was blue also, as though it had been dipped in beautiful ink, midnight at the tip. I would admire him, then I would lie with him all night. You know what I'm telling you. In the morning I'd wake up sick over what I'd done. But the next night it would be the



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same thing again. I could not resist him. He said the sweetest things to me, like a good angel, but the things that he did were darkly inspired.

Now, I ask you, how was it that Cuthbert's sisters knew the shape of my dreams? When he told me that his sisters were telling this story, all about me and the Devil, he laughed. He was more worried that I might have my eyes on his eighty acres, cleared and planted, or on the money the bank kept locked up. He laughed until he shook, about the man in the blue suit his sisters spoke of, and did not notice how, when I heard that, I nearly went faint off my feet. I recovered. I thought about it. It did not take me long to realize that the only way that Cuthbert's sisters could possibly know about my devil was if he had told them about me when he visited them, too.

I grew furious and plotted out of jealousy to have my revenge. I decided to kill him, though I wasn't sure just how to destroy a man who existed only as a phantom, without physical substance. Then it came to me that I must dream the instrument of his death. I must conceive of a knife that was honed and sharp and thorough in its detail.

Each night, I dreamed a knife beneath my pillow. I dreamed about its shape and weight. I dreamed its black wooden handle. I dreamed its sharpness. I dreamed the gleam of white light at its tip. I dreamed the way it would feel in my hands. I dreamed how it would fit between the dream ribs of my angel of perversion. I dreamed all this so well that, when the time came, I reached beneath the pillow and found the perfectly dreamed weapon—it was a memory of a dream I dreamed, a dream within a dream. The death I dealt him was undreamable, however, and horrible. I woke soaked with terror and tears. The nightmare haunted me all morning as I prepared for the feast day of the Assumption. A celebration was supposed to take place at the church, and at Holy Mass the priest was to read the banns preceding my marriage to Cuthbert.

I was shaky that day, and my mother said that I was pale. But I made six pies. Three for Cuthbert. He was running in the fat man's race. Every year, only the biggest of the big men lined up. Their race, comical and thunderous, was always the feast day's high point. At the end of it, the winner would have his choice of pies and a holy medal for a ribbon—St. Jude or St. Christopher or Theresa of the Little Flowers. As we drove our wagon to the church grounds, I was almost giddy with happiness. I'd killed off the Devil and would soon marry Cuthbert. His sisters would wonder at the loss of their own blue demon, but they would never know that I was the one who had killed him.

Then came shock. As the big men lined up at the far end of the field, while we watched, pointing and making little bets of money on this one or the other, there entered into the group a black-haired man in a blue suit and blue shirt, blue tie, and blue shoes. Only he was much, much bigger than he was in my dream. He lined up with the rest of them. I don't know if my eyes or Cuthbert's sisters' eyes opened wider, or whose jaw dropped farther, but I was the only one who knew that, having killed the Devil in a dream, I had brought him to life. And here he was, racing Cuthbert for the fat man's prize.

He didn't look well at all, I saw as they began to run. He was bloated and gray as a gorged tick, his skin tinted green. He ran holding a hand against his ribs, and I nearly shrieked as he passed and turned on me the flash of his red, robbed eyes. His mouth was open, and I saw that it was filled with black blood. He and Cuthbert were neck and neck, out ahead of the others, and I saw that the Devil was taunting and mocking my husband-to-be, who flew into a rage of running and leaped like a great stag to surge ahead.

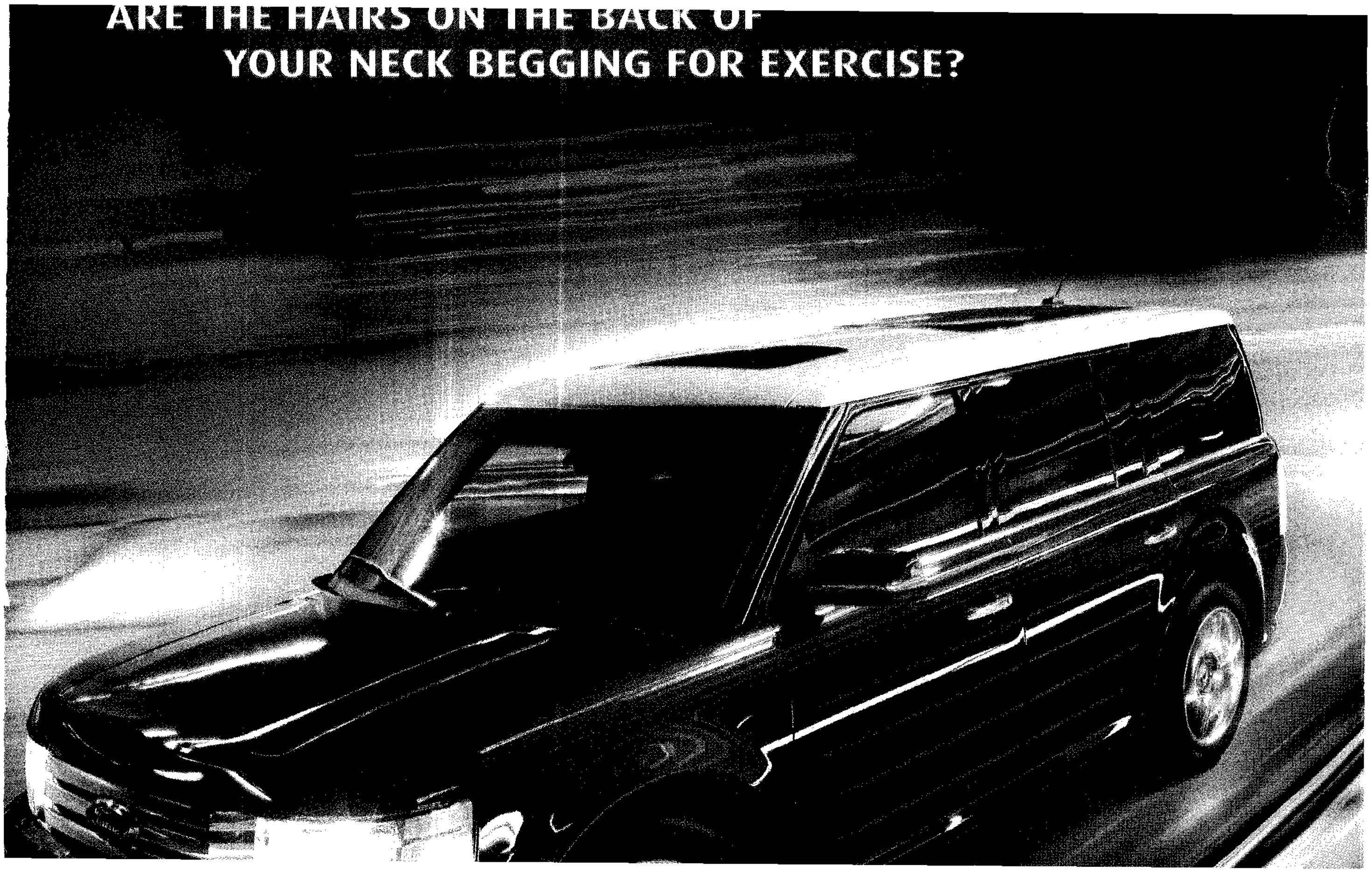
When it was over, two men lay still at the finish line. One was Cuthbert, who had died of a burst heart. The other man had been dead all along, people said. When they opened the blue jacket, they found a knife with a black handle buried to the hilt between his ribs.

So, Grandma Ignatia said, I married instead a man who hadn't an ounce of spare flesh, a man who hated the color blue and never wore it, a man whose sisters liked me. I lived with him for fifty-seven years, didn't I, and the two of us had eight children. Adopted twenty. Raised every kind of animal that you can think of, didn't we, and grew our corn and oats, and every fall dug out hills of potatoes. We picked wild rice, and now and then we shot a deer from off the back porch, and, yes, we fed our children good, now, didn't we? ♦

ALBA

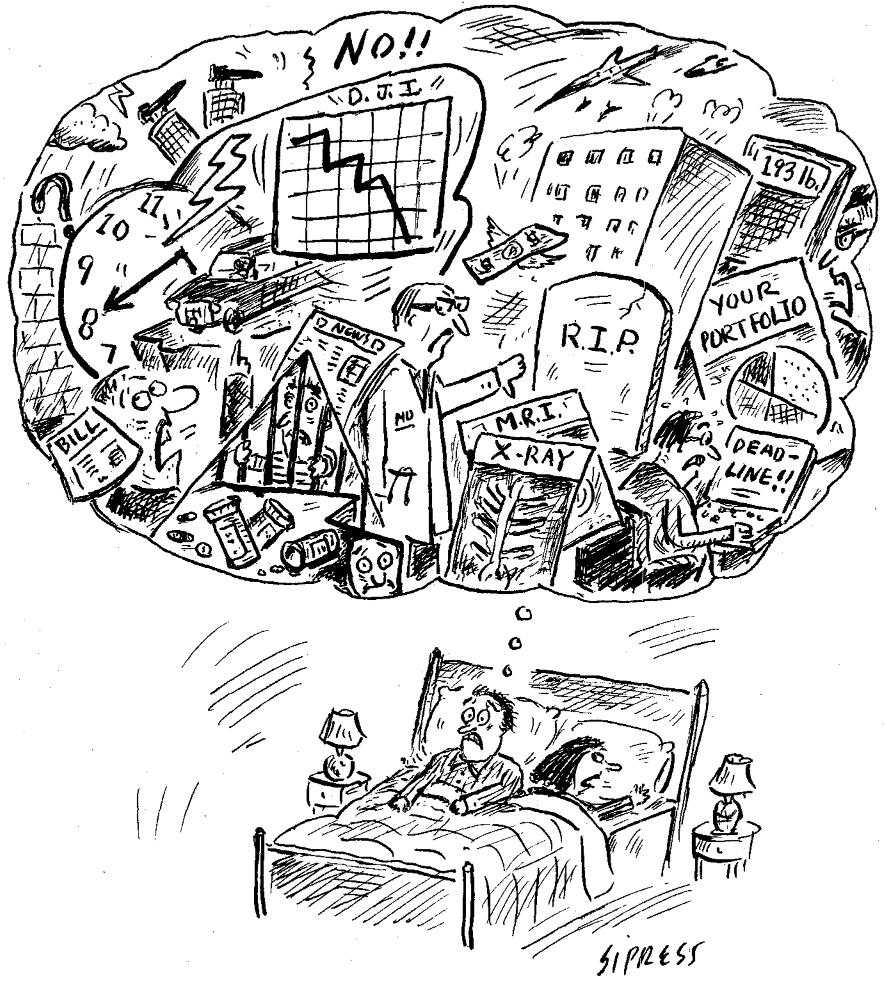
Climbing in the mist I came to a terrace wall
and saw above it a small field of broad beans in flower
their white fragrance was flowing through the first light
of morning there a little way up the mountain
where I had made my way through the olive groves
and under the blossoming boughs of the almonds
above the old hut of the charcoal burner
where suddenly the scent of the bean flowers found me
and as I took the next step I heard
the creak of the harness and the mule's shod hooves
striking stones in the furrow and then the low voice
of the man talking softly praising the mule
as he walked behind through the cloud in his white shirt
along the row and between his own words
he was singing under his breath a few phrases
at a time of the same song singing it
to his mule it seemed as I listened
watching their breaths and not understanding a word

—*W. S. Merwin*


ARE THE HAIRS ON THE BACK OF
YOUR NECK BEGGING FOR EXERCISE?

THE FUNNIES

TRYING TIMES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NEWS
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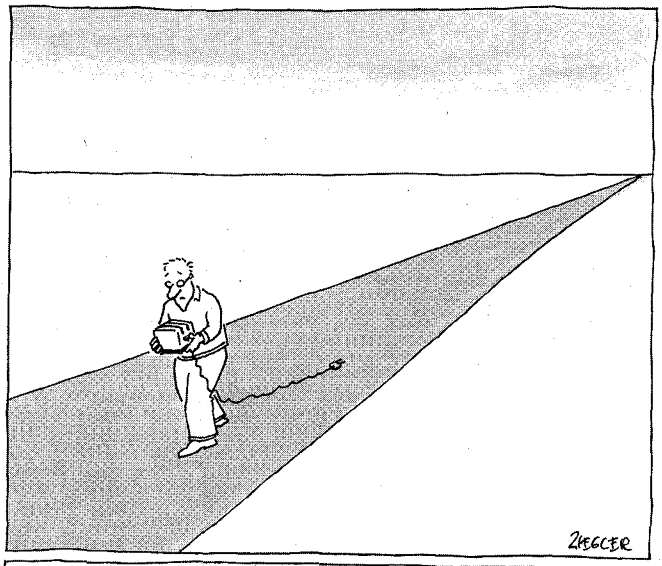
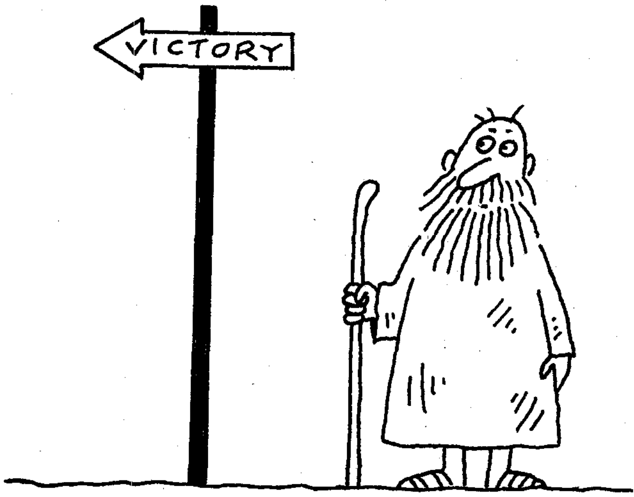
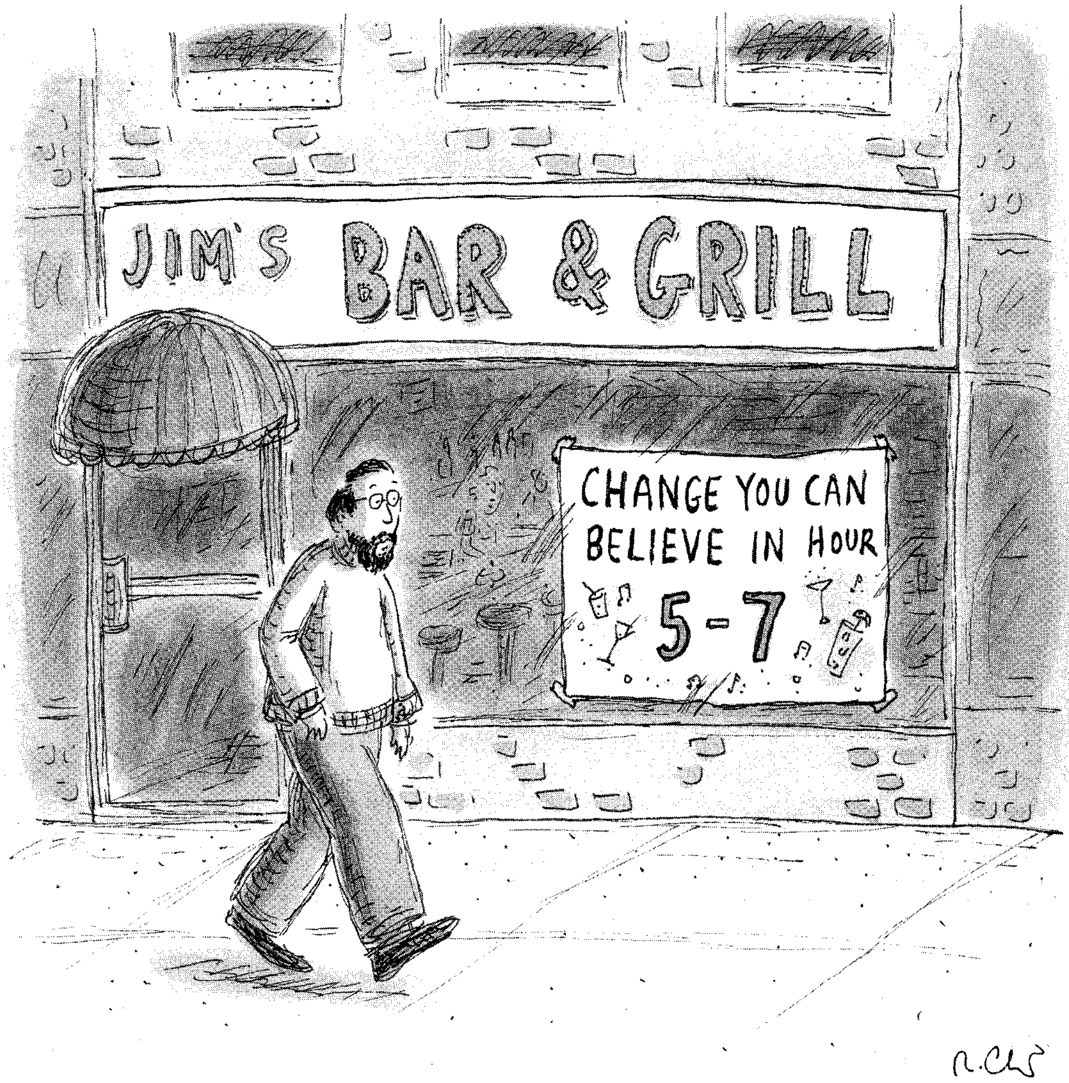
"Try thinking about something else."



WHAT I GOT TO KEEP FROM MY LIFE'S SAVINGS

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CHANGE YOU CAN BELIEVE IN HOUR
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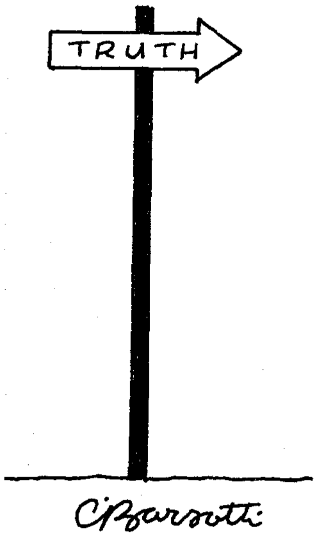
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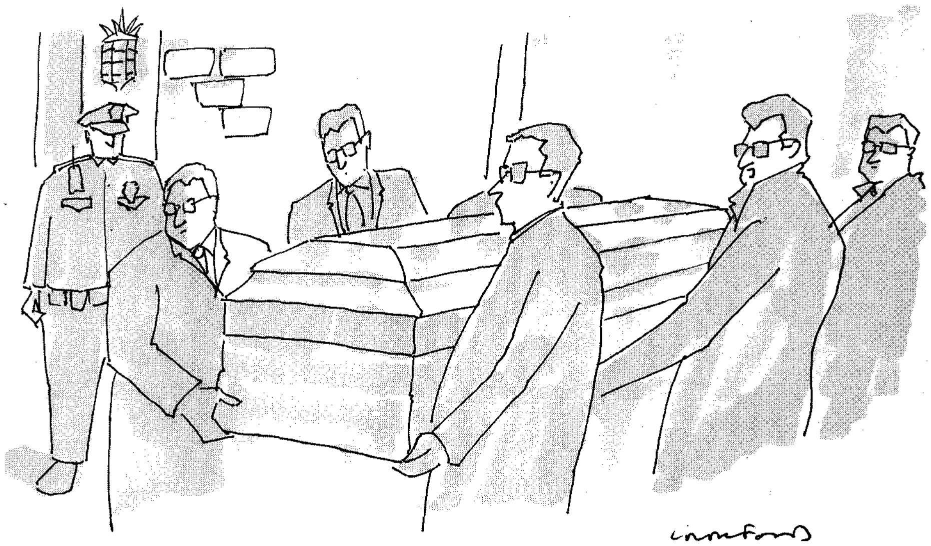
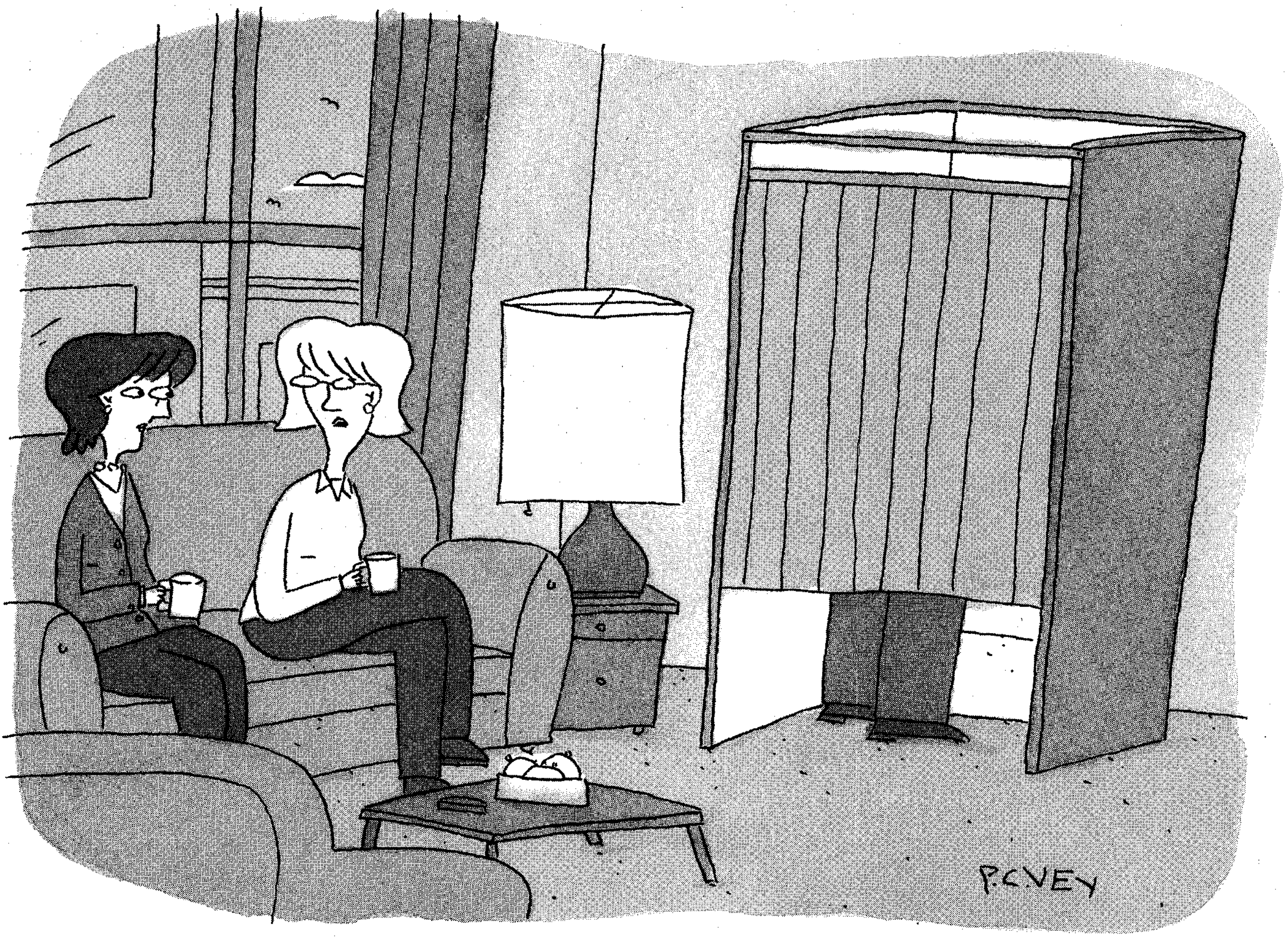
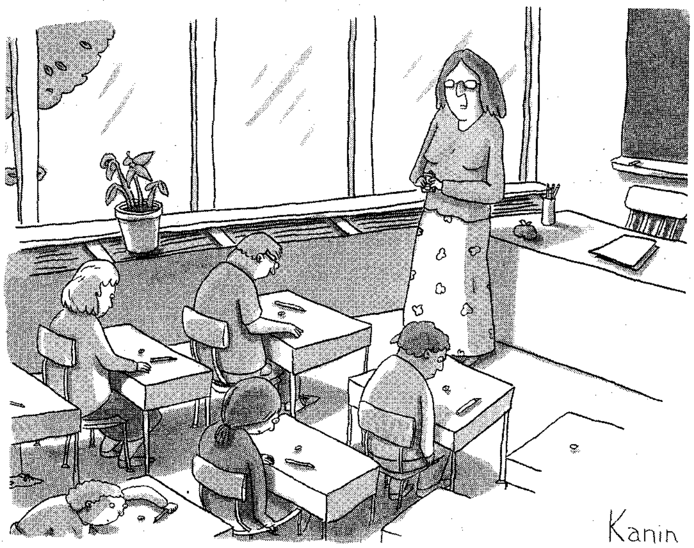


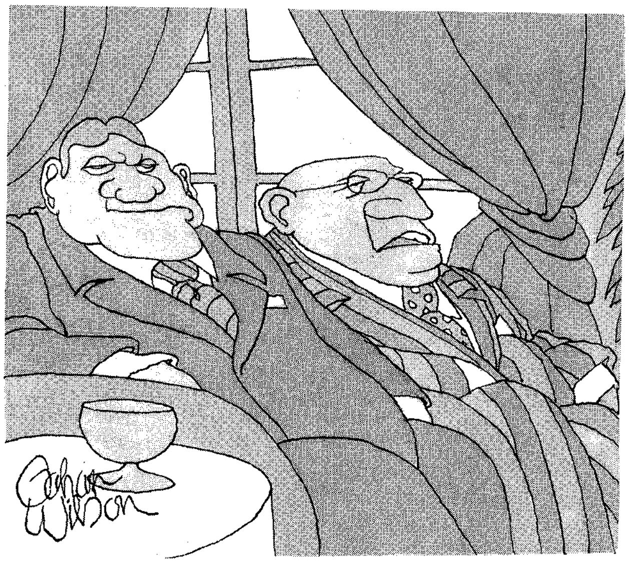
"I'm just glad he had a good life and filed his absentee ballot last week."



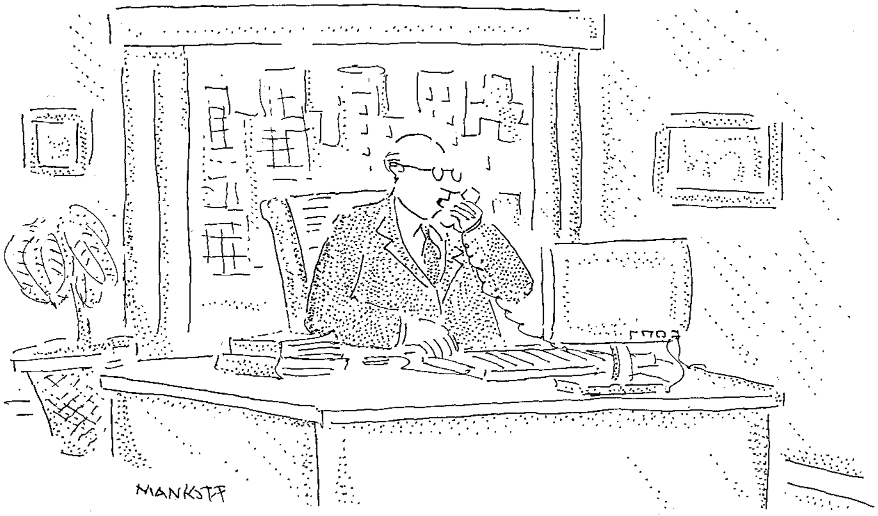
"His vote doesn't count, but at least he gets a sense of being part of the process."



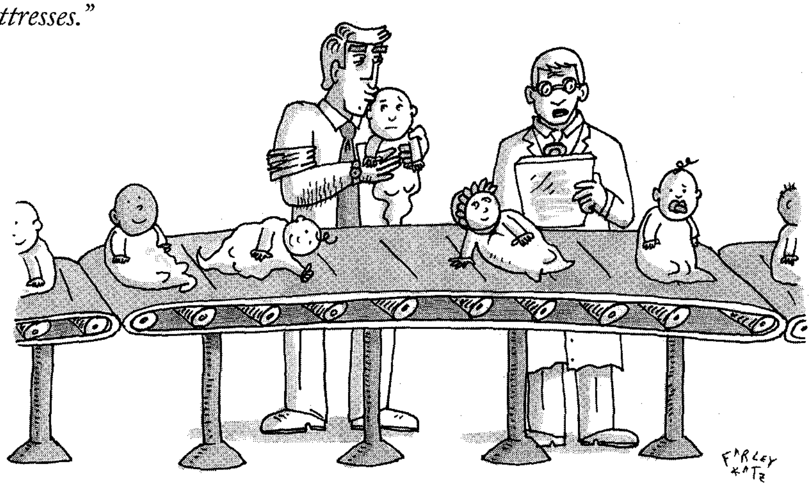
"The school couldn't afford pumpkins, so this year we'll be carving raisins."



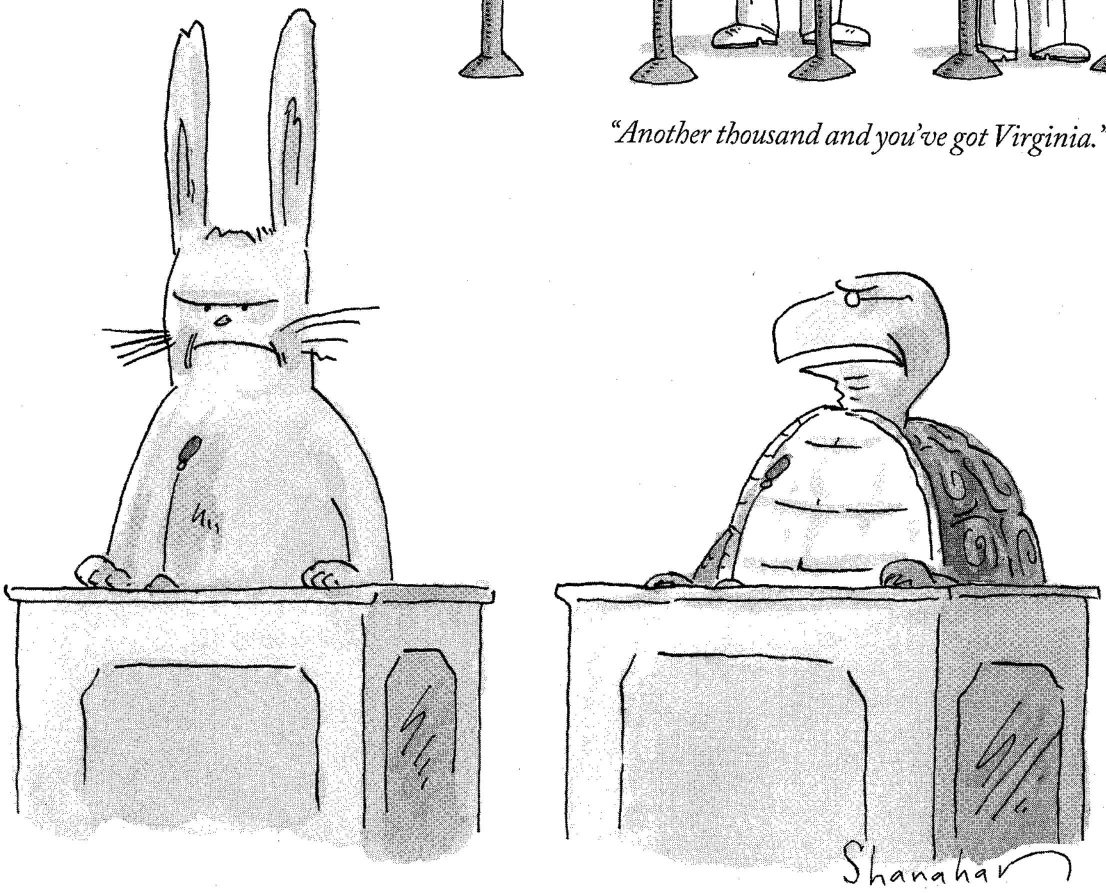
"Privatizing the President could be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on who owned him."



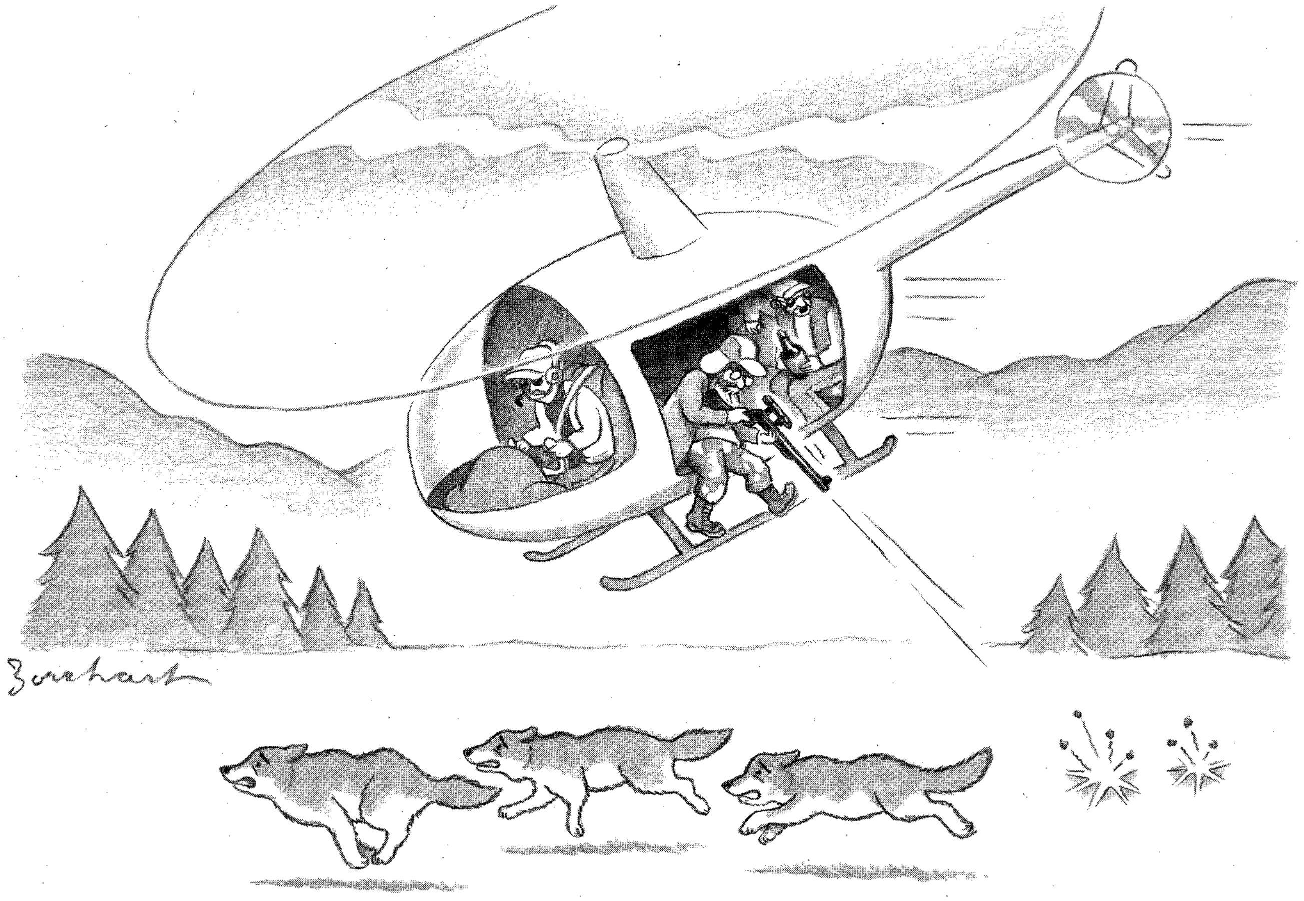
"Right now I think the wisest strategy is to diversify among your mattresses."


FARLEY KATZ

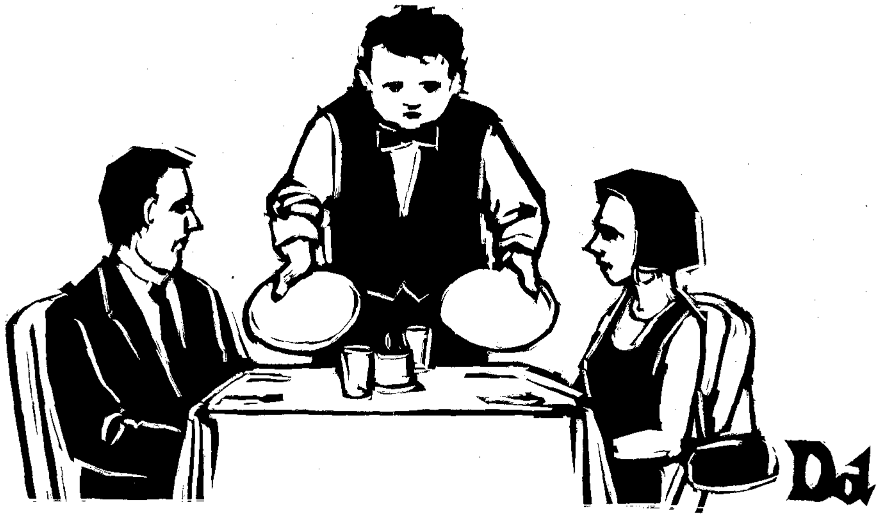
"Another thousand and you've got Virginia."



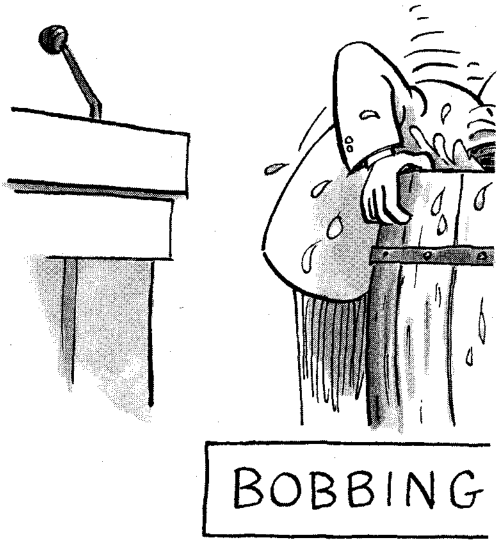
"And now my opponent accuses me of playing the race card."

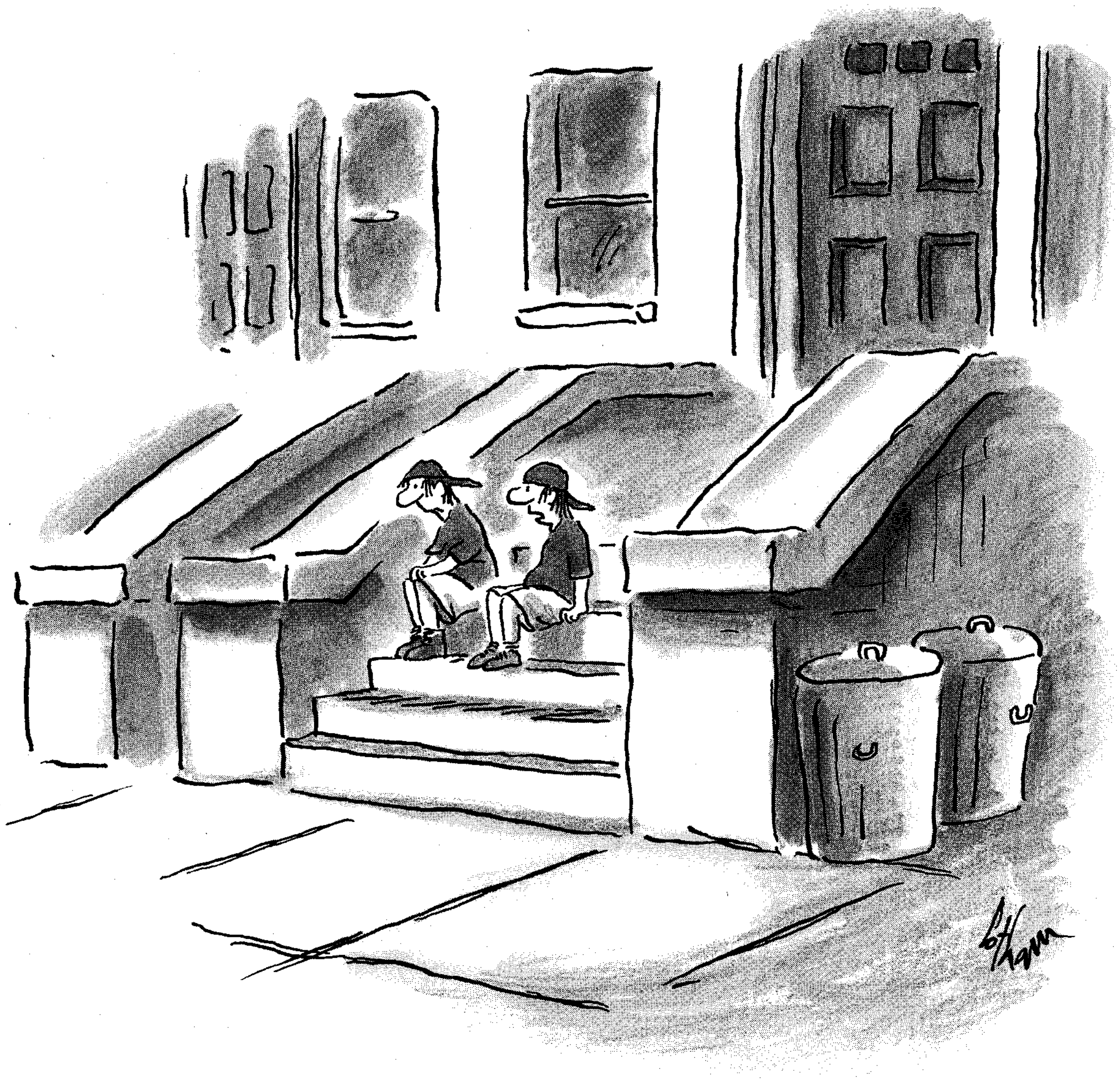


"Folks say this ain't sporting, but they don't factor in the alcohol."

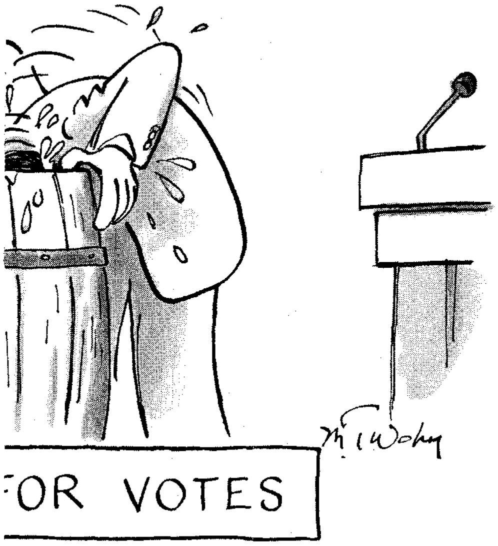


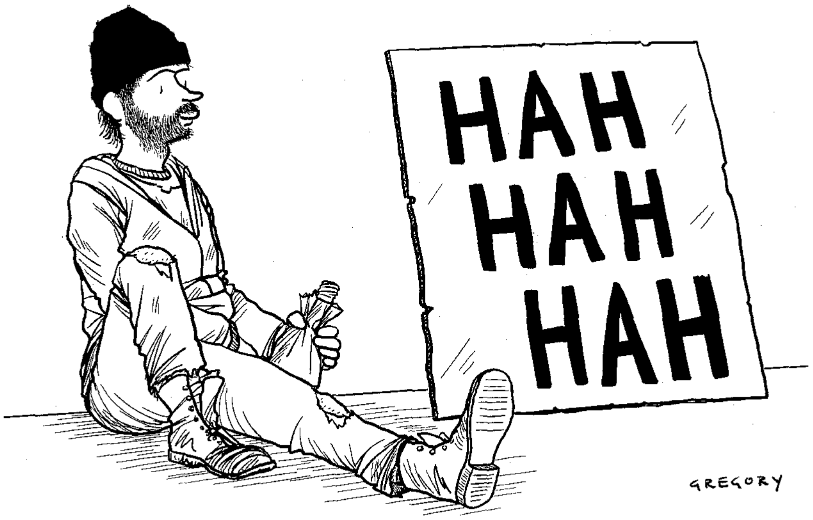
"Who has the nanofilet, and who has the fasting platter?"



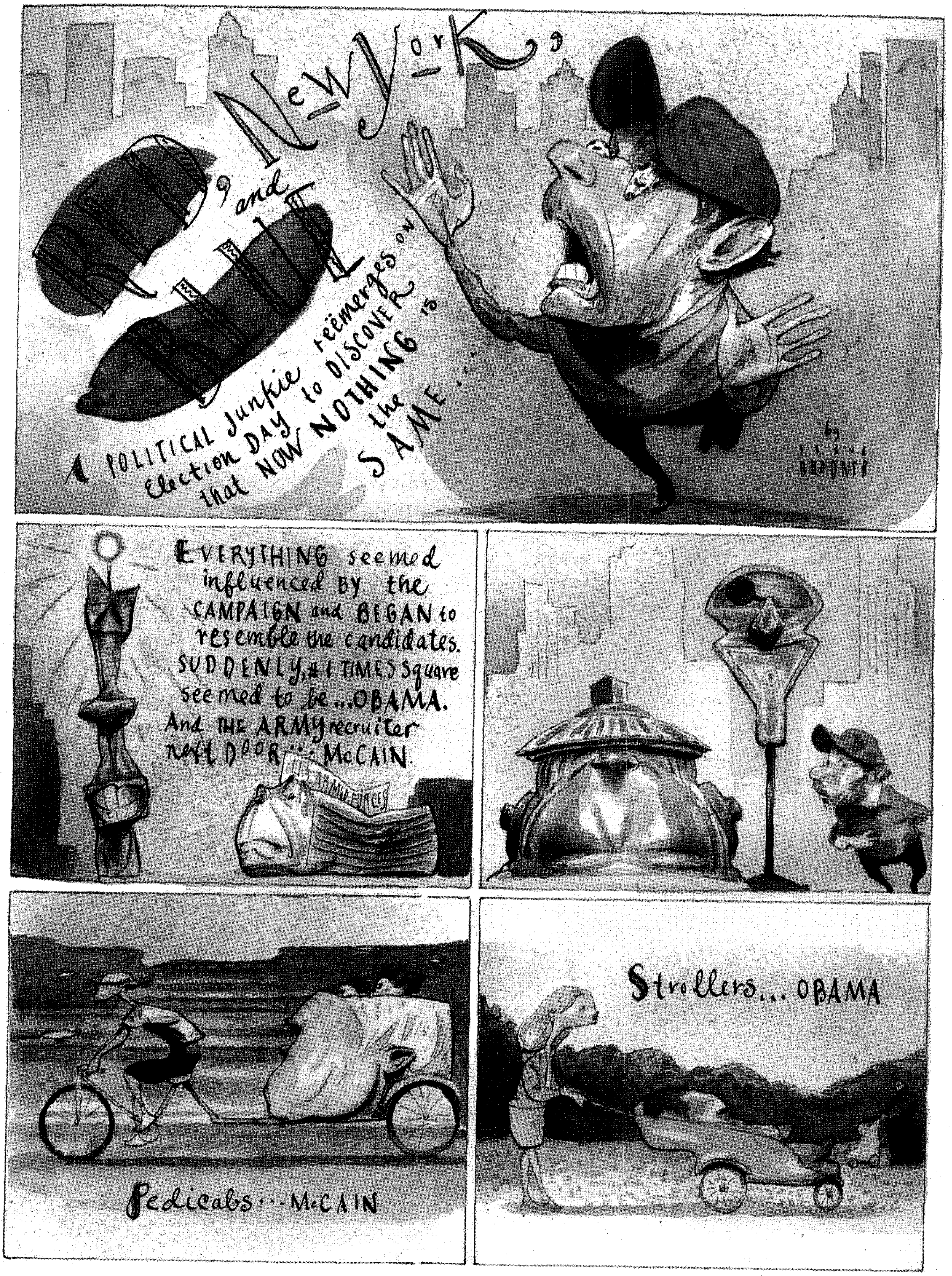


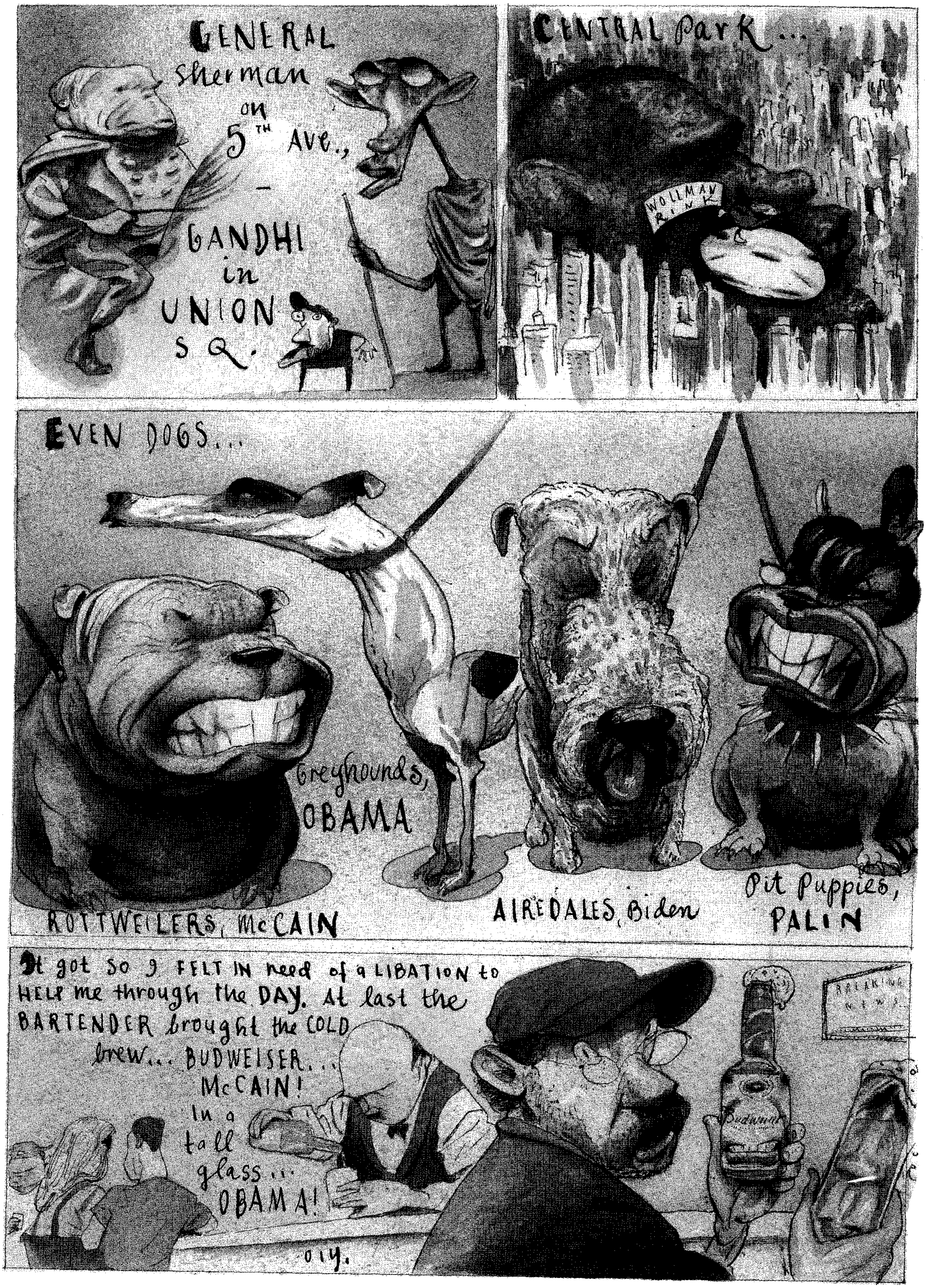
"I was an abstinence-only baby."




HAH
HAH
HAH
GREGORY

SKETCHBOOK BY STEVE BRODNER


"and New York"
A POLITICAL Junkie reëmerges on Election DAY to DISCOVER that NOW NOTHING is the SAME...
by STEVE BRODNER
EVERYTHING seemed influenced by the CAMPAIGN and BEGAN to resemble the candidates. SUDDENLY, #1 TIMES Square seemed to be...OBAMA. And THE ARMY recruiter next DOOR... McCAIN.
U.S. ARMED FORCES
Pedicabs...McCAIN
Strollers... OBAMA


GENERAL Sherman on 5TH AVE., – GANDHI in UNION SQ.
CENTRAL Park...
WOLLMAN RINK
EVEN DOGS...
Greyhounds, OBAMA
ROTTWEILERS, McCAIN
AIREDALES, Biden
Pit Puppies, PALIN
It got so I FELT IN need of a LIBATION to HELP me through the DAY. At last the BARTENDER brought the COLD brew... BUDWEISER... McCAIN! In a tall glass... OBAMA!
BREAKING NEWS
Budweiser
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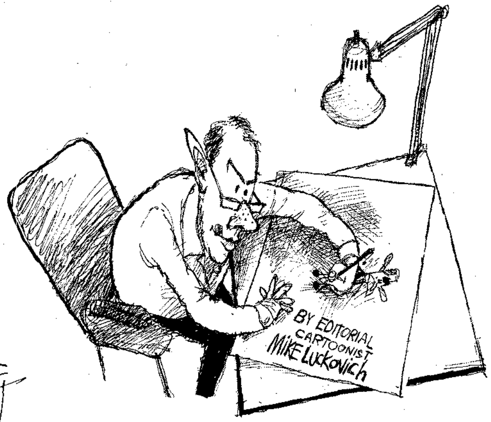
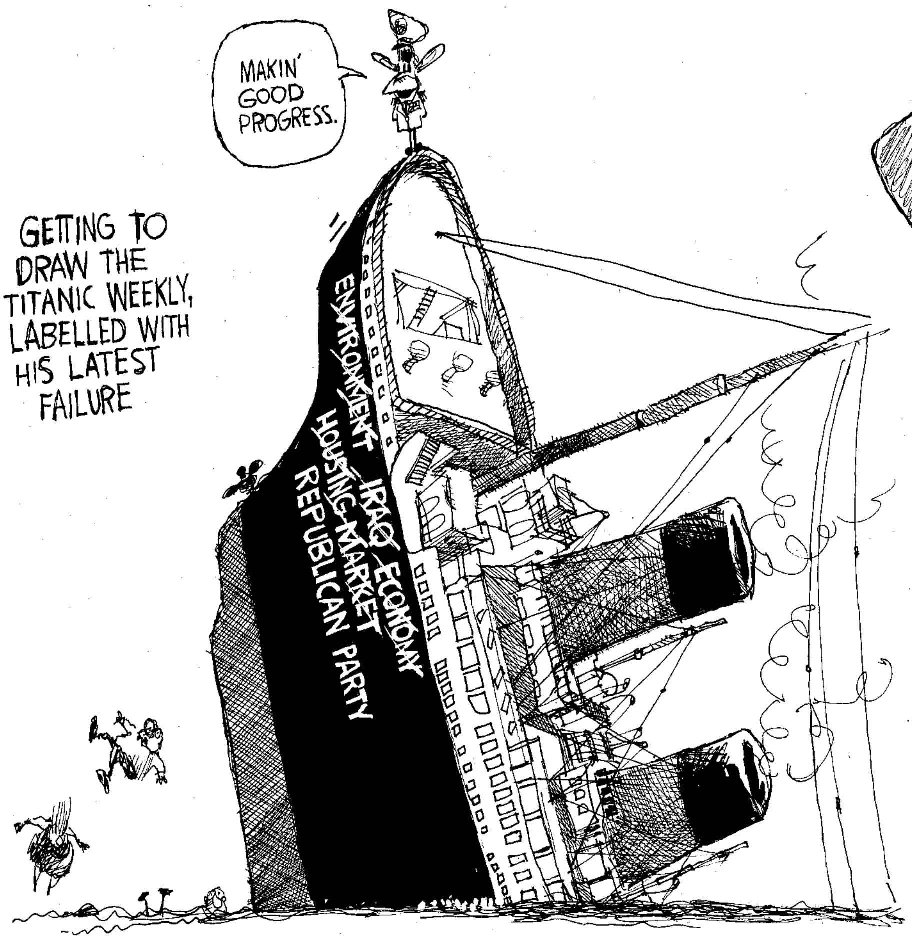
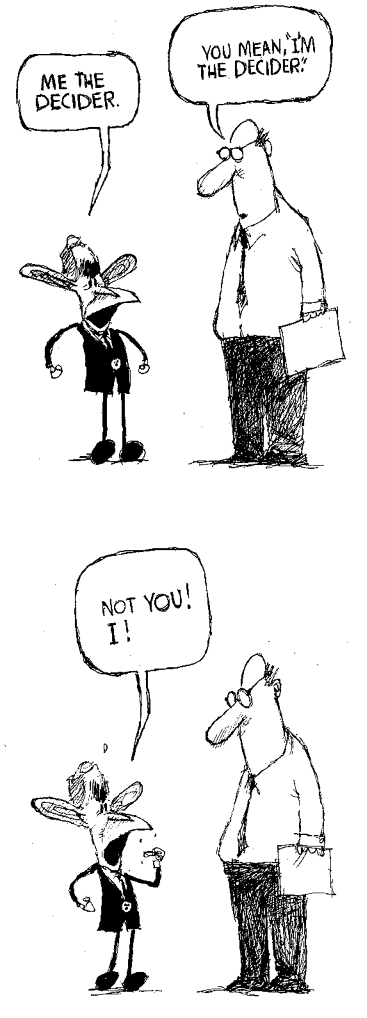
WHAT I'LL MISS ABOUT GEORGE W.


BY EDITORIAL CARTOONIST MIKE LUCKOVICH

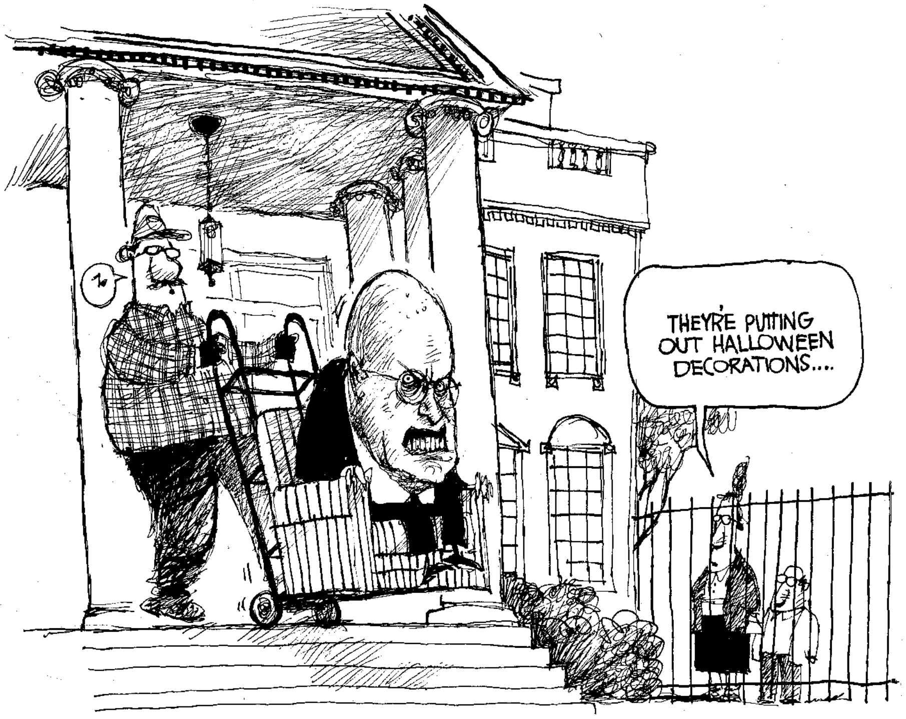
GETTING TO DRAW THE TITANIC WEEKLY, LABELLED WITH HIS LATEST FAILURE


MAKIN' GOOD PROGRESS.
ENVIRONMENT IRAQ ECONOMY
HOUSING MARKET
REPUBLICAN PARTY

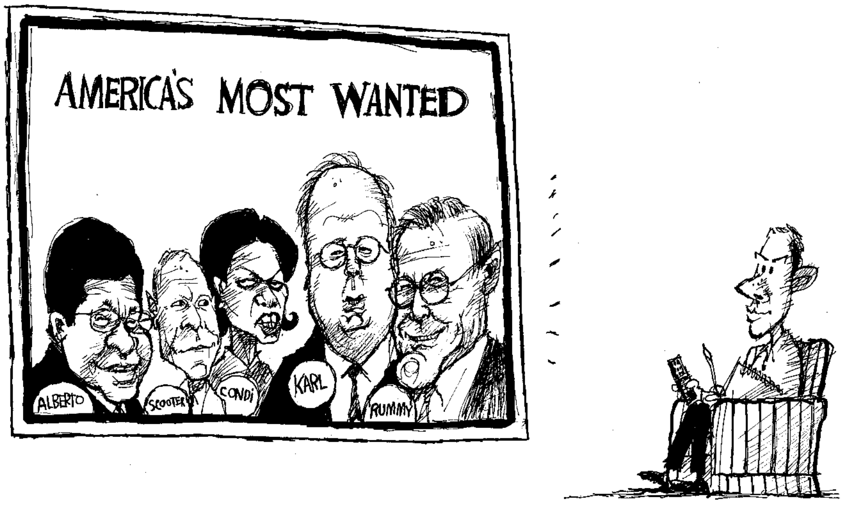
HIS WAR ON GRAMMAR


ME THE DECIDER.
YOU MEAN, 'I'M THE DECIDER.'
NOT YOU! I!

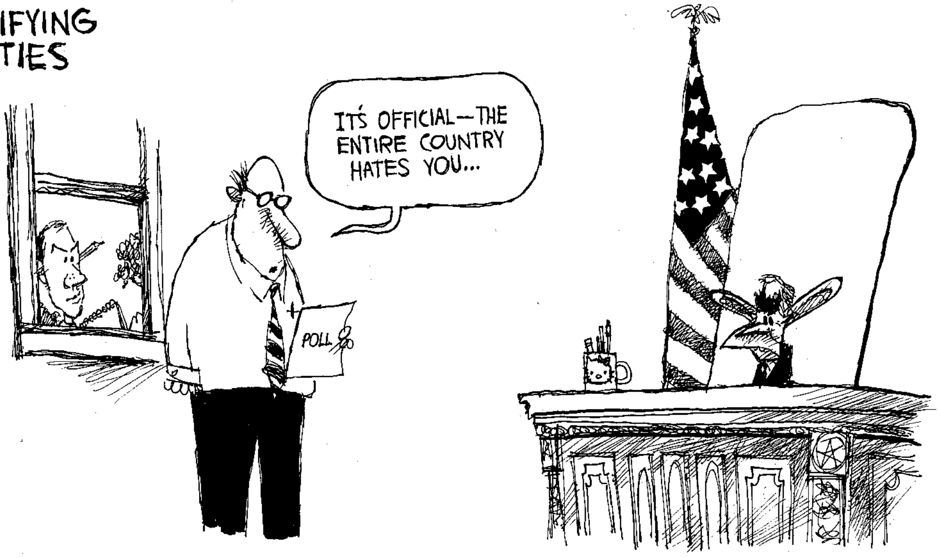
HIS SCARY VEEP


THEY'RE PUTTING OUT HALLOWEEN DECORATIONS....

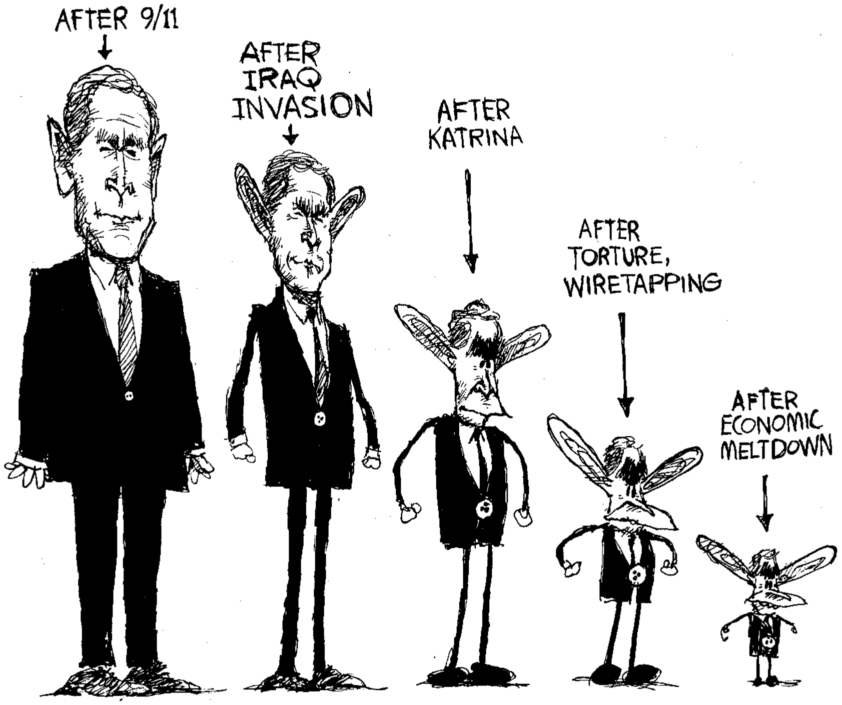
HIS ACCOMPLICES


AMERICA'S MOST WANTED
ALBERTO
SCOOTER
CONDI
KARL
RUMMY

HIS UNIFYING QUALITIES

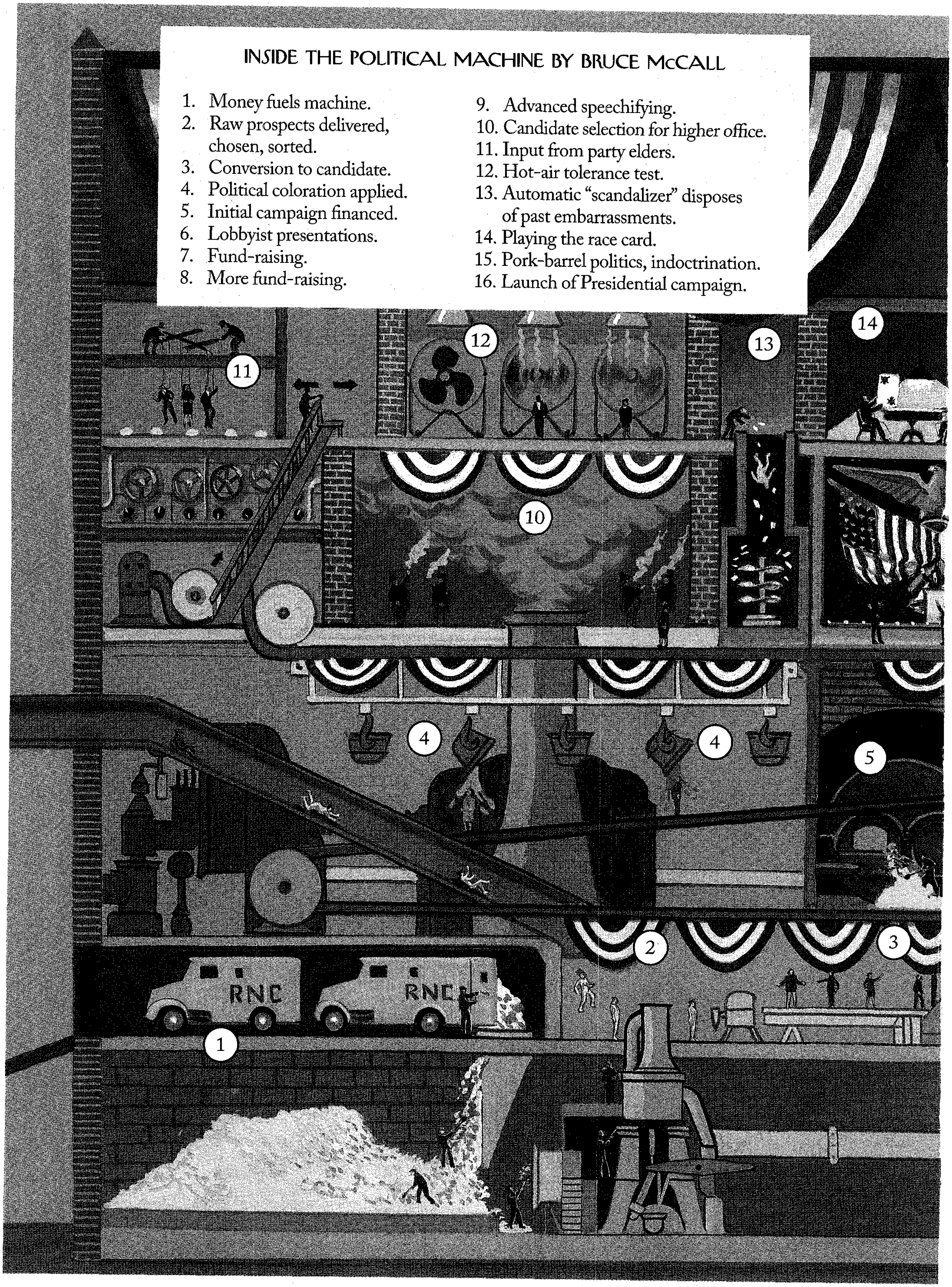

IT'S OFFICIAL—THE ENTIRE COUNTRY HATES YOU...
POLL

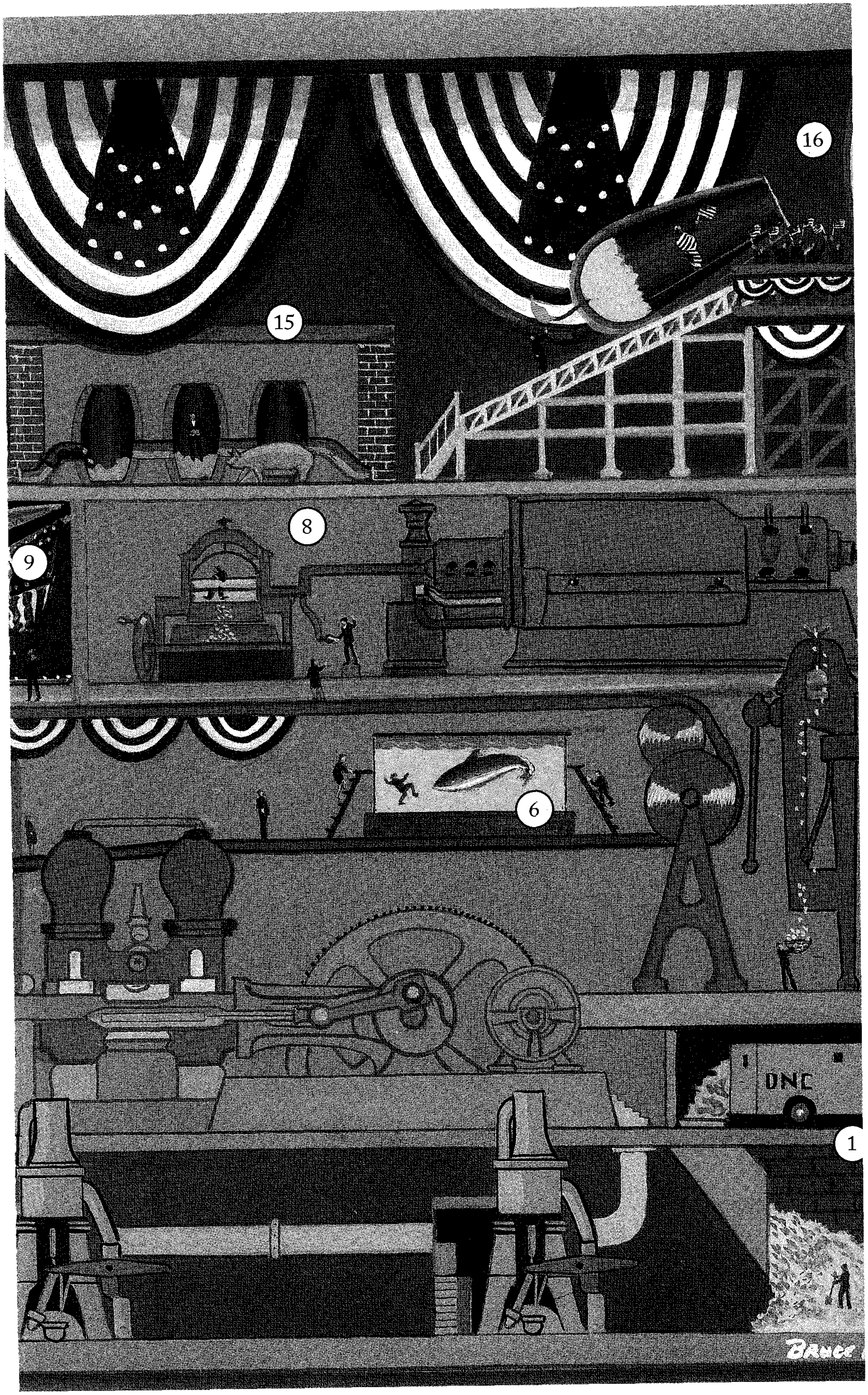
HIS EVOLUTION ALLOWED ME TO SAVE MORE AND MORE DRAWING TIME AND INK.


AFTER 9/11
AFTER IRAQ INVASION
AFTER KATRINA
AFTER TORTURE, WIRETAPPING
AFTER ECONOMIC MELTDOWN

INSIDE THE POLITICAL MACHINE BY BRUCE McCALL

1. Money fuels machine.
2. Raw prospects delivered, chosen, sorted.
3. Conversion to candidate.
4. Political coloration applied.
5. Initial campaign financed.
6. Lobbyist presentations.
7. Fund-raising.
8. More fund-raising.
9. Advanced speechifying.
10. Candidate selection for higher office.
11. Input from party elders.
12. Hot-air tolerance test.
13. Automatic "scandalizer" disposes of past embarrassments.
14. Playing the race card.
15. Pork-barrel politics, indoctrination.
16. Launch of Presidential campaign.

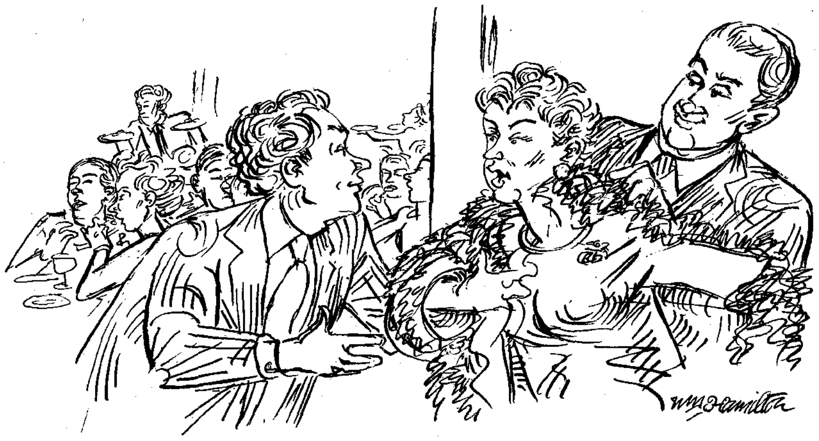



16
15
8
9
6
1
DNC
BRUCE

CARTOON I.Q. TEST

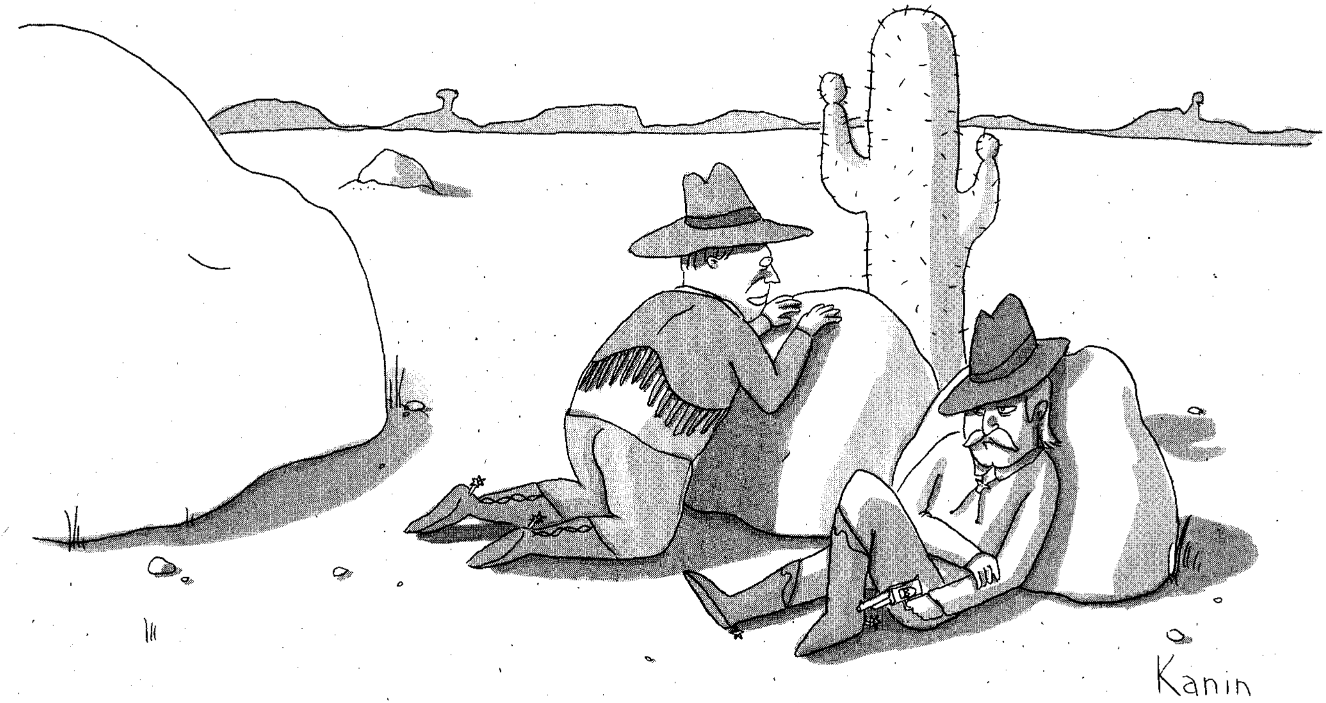
I DON'T GET IT

Sometimes, we run a cartoon so subtle that many of our readers are lost. And sometimes they let us know about it. We present here five recent cartoons that seemed to confound our readers. For each cartoon, we give the actual explanation of the joke along with three false ones. It's up to you to determine whether the original rationale is any less silly than the deliberately fanciful ones. (The answers are below.)



"Revelatory, Michael—such airy meatballs."

1)
A. "Airy" is a terrible consistency for meatballs. Ideally, you want them to be dense and chewy.
B. She is being sarcastic. The meatballs have made her sick and now she is off to the hospital, posthaste.
C. In high society, it is impolite to speak ill of meatballs, no matter how overspiced they may be.
D. It is funny that meatballs were served at such a fancy dinner party.

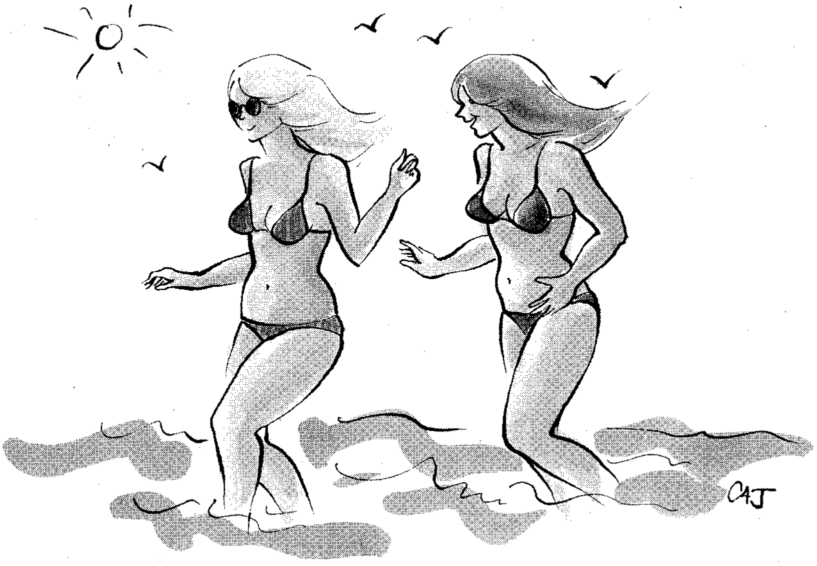


"Those idiots, they're burning their own arrows! Oh—oh, God no."

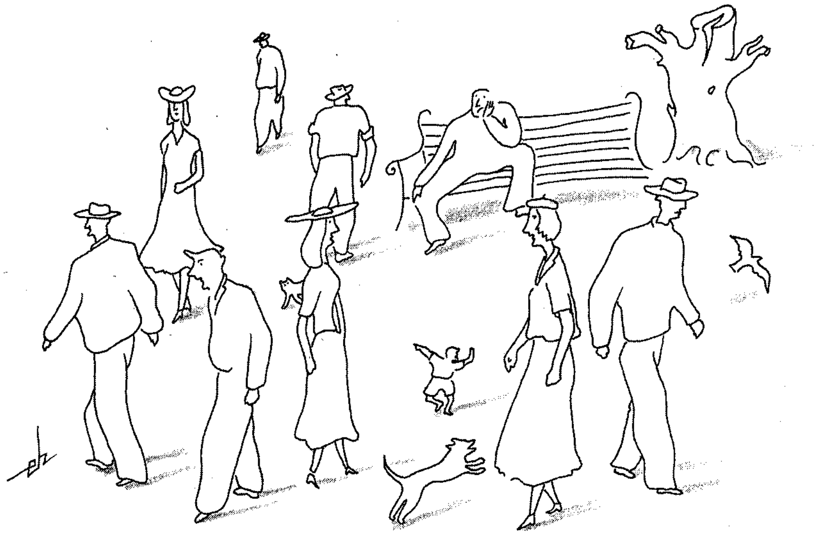
2)
A. The cowboy just realized the terrible faux pas he made earlier by calling the Native Americans "Indians."
B. The cowboys' enemies are lighting the arrows in order to burn down the nearby rocks and cactus.
C. The enemies are lighting their arrows, but, for the cartoon to make sense, the men should have been in a fort or some other structure that can actually burn down.
D. These cowboys are spying on Native Americans who are attacking some other cowboys, in a faraway fort.

HAMILTON, 1/7/2008; KANIN, 8/4/2008; JOHNSON, 7/3/2006; HILGERDT, 9/8/2008; CRAWFORD, 4/7/2008

3)
A. The two woman are suffering from heat stroke—they actually believe that they are eighty years old.
B. Just as "hang ten" refers to a surfing maneuver, "turning eighty" is young people's slang for playing in the water.
C. Modern technology and plastic surgery have made eighty the new thirty.
D. Each woman is turning forty years old, for a combined age of eighty.



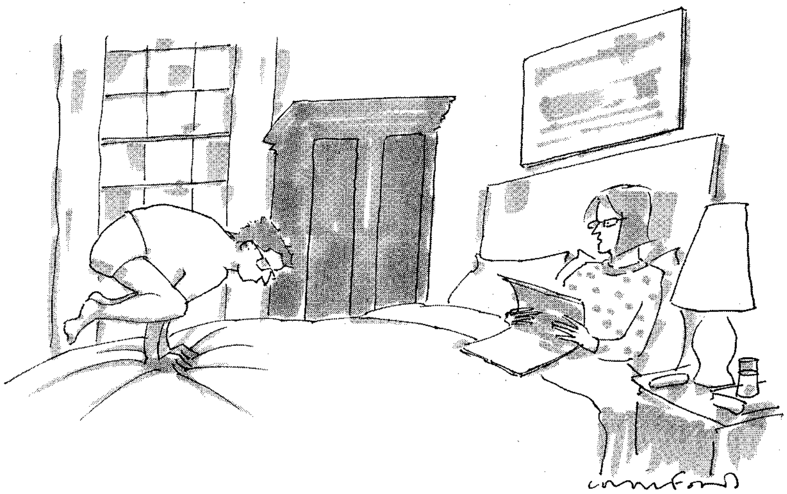
"I never thought turning eighty would be so much fun!"



NEXT TUESDAY AROUND TEN

4)
A. The text was not meant to be printed in the magazine but, rather, is a reminder that the artist wrote to himself about his podiatrist appointment next week.
B. Life is short and precious. It's important to get outside and enjoy nature, especially on Tuesdays around ten.
C. Hats are making a resurgence, and one man is not happy about it.
D. The cartoon is poking fun at the interchangeability of events. Next Tuesday around ten is the same as next Friday around four.

5)
A. In lovemaking, as in all things, practice makes perfect.
B. Yoga is so popular these days it's everywhere—even in the bedroom.
C. Sometimes spouses can be deliberately and aggravatingly passive-aggressive.
D. The man represents Obama and the woman represents McCain, or vice versa.



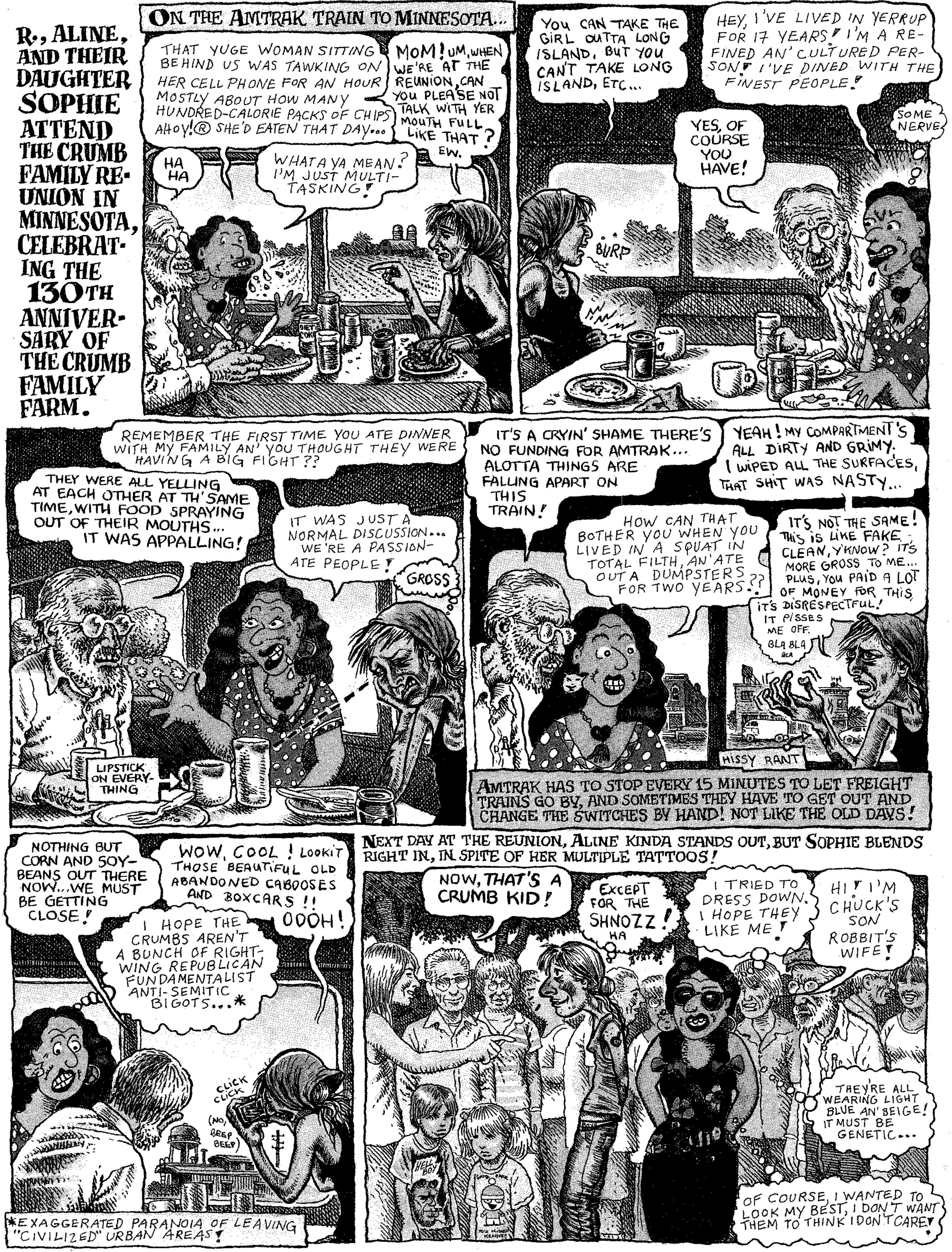
"Take. Your. Time!"

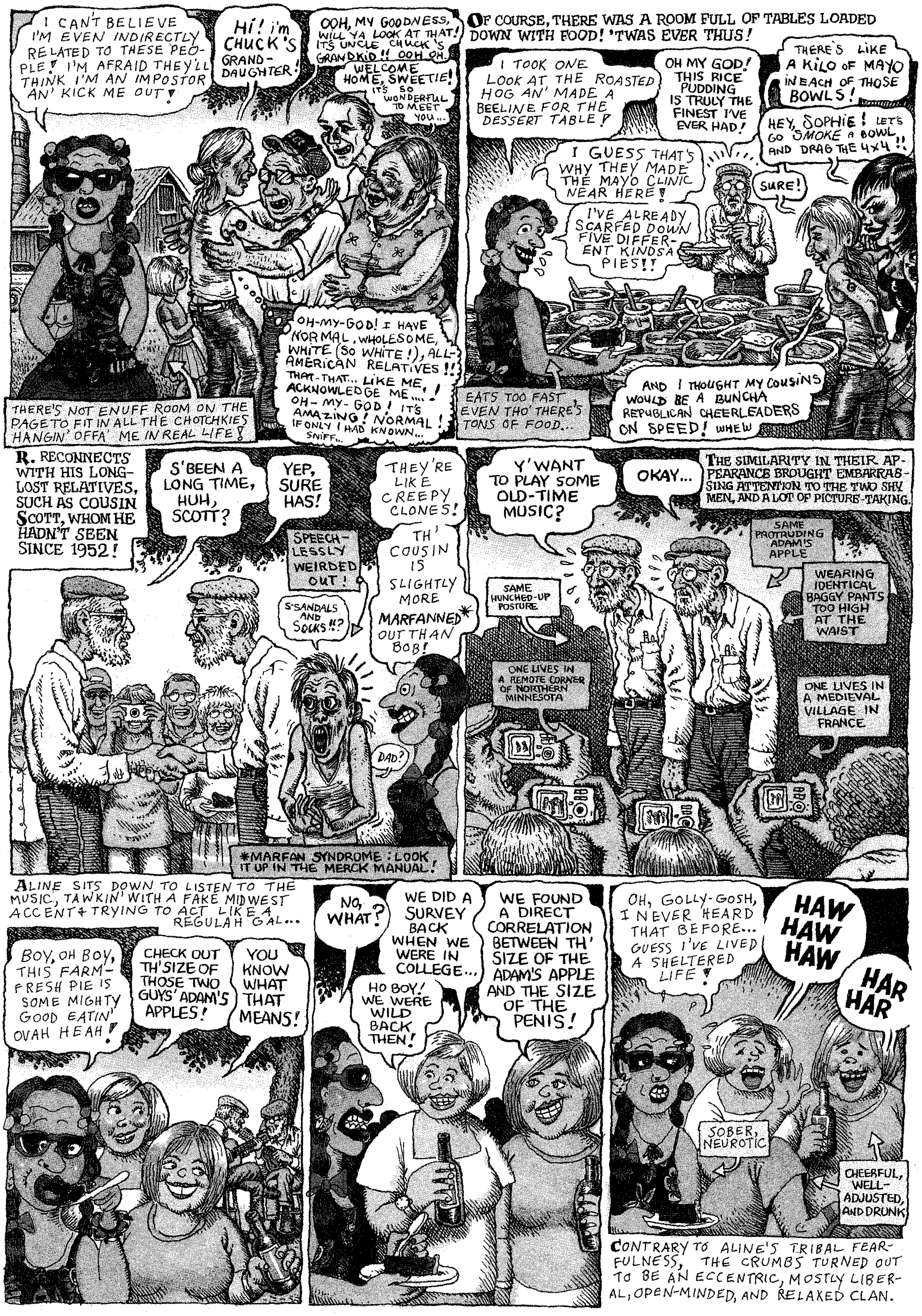
Answers: (1)D, (2)C, (3)C, (4)D, (5)C

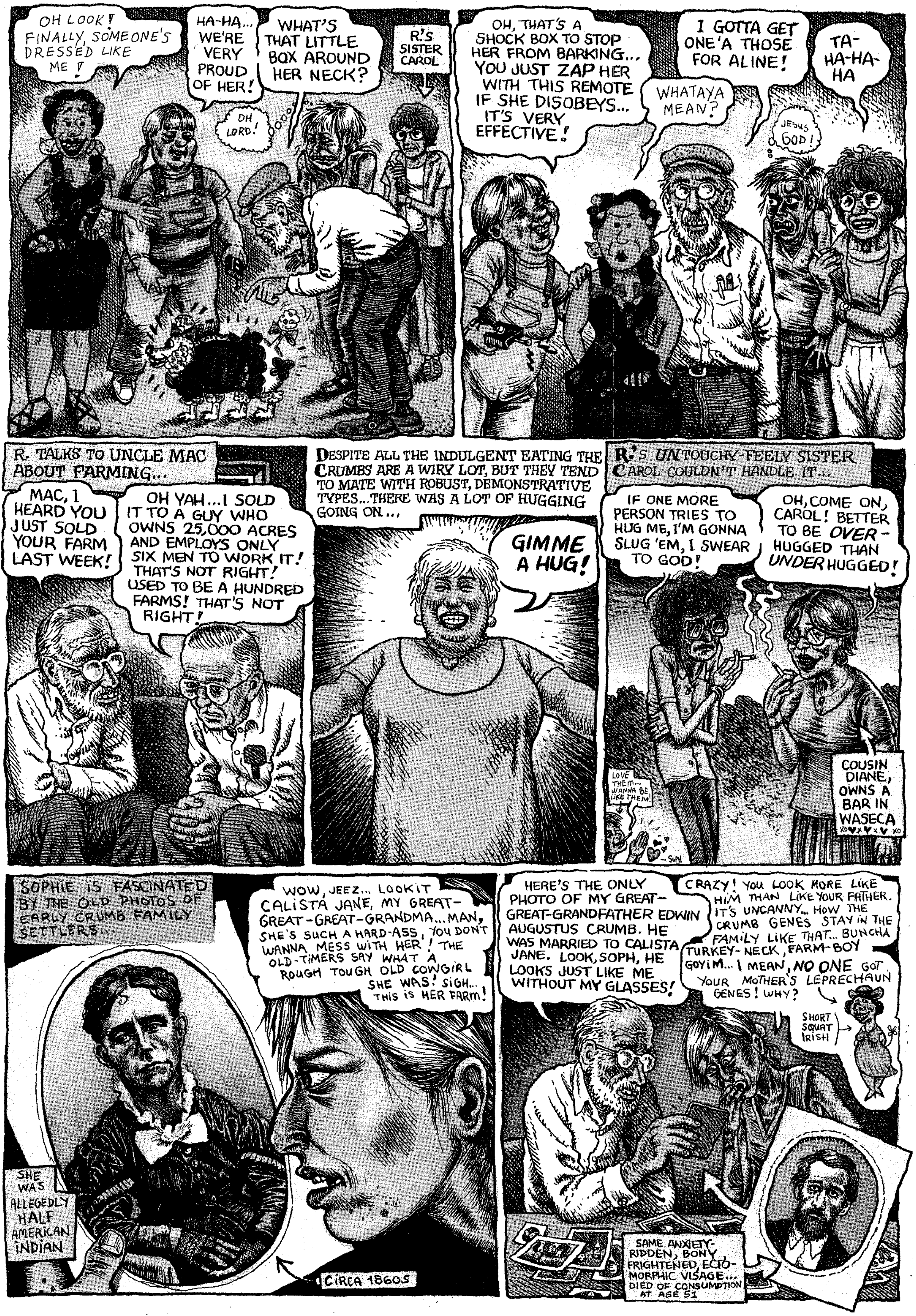
ALINE, SOPHIE & R. CRUMB *in*

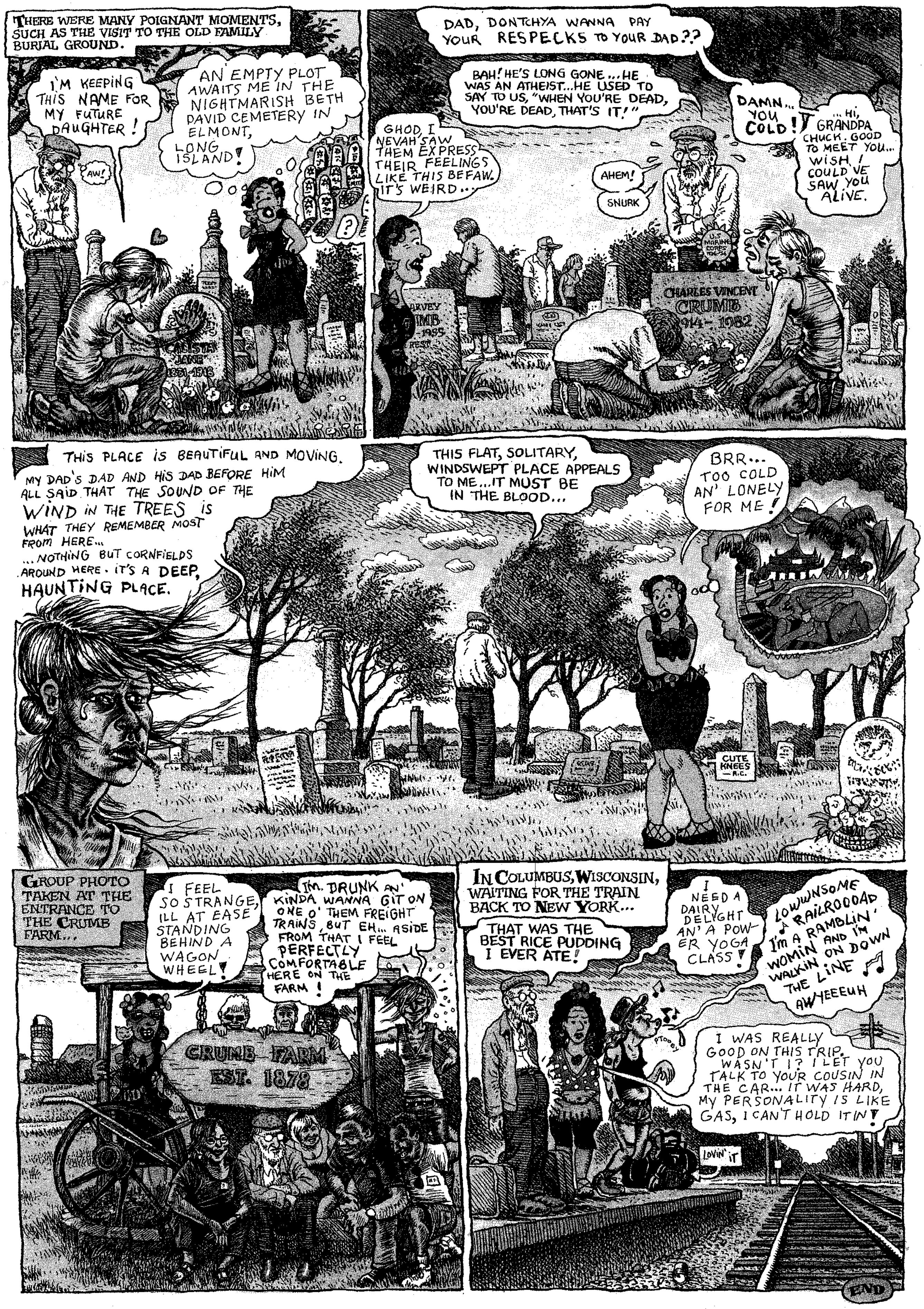
"Don't Talk with Yer Mouth Full"

WRITTEN & DRAWN BY THE THREE OF THEM ©2008

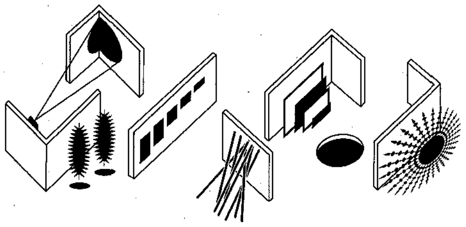

R., ALINE, AND THEIR DAUGHTER SOPHIE ATTEND THE CRUMB FAMILY RE-UNION IN MINNESOTA, CELEBRATING THE 130TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CRUMB FAMILY FARM.
ON THE AMTRAK TRAIN TO MINNESOTA...
THAT YUGE WOMAN SITTING BEHIND US WAS TAWKING ON HER CELL PHONE FOR AN HOUR MOSTLY ABOUT HOW MANY HUNDRED-CALORIE PACKS OF CHIPS AHOY!® SHE'D EATEN THAT DAY...
MOM! UM, WHEN WE'RE AT THE REUNION, CAN YOU PLEASE NOT TALK WITH YER MOUTH FULL LIKE THAT? EW.
HA HA
WHATA YA MEAN? I'M JUST MULTI-TASKING!
YOU CAN TAKE THE GIRL OUTTA LONG ISLAND, BUT YOU CAN'T TAKE LONG ISLAND, ETC...
HEY, I'VE LIVED IN YERRUP FOR 17 YEARS! I'M A REFINED AN' CULTURED PERSON! I'VE DINED WITH THE FINEST PEOPLE!
YES, OF COURSE YOU HAVE!
SOME NERVE
BURP
REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME YOU ATE DINNER WITH MY FAMILY AN' YOU THOUGHT THEY WERE HAVING A BIG FIGHT??
THEY WERE ALL YELLING AT EACH OTHER AT TH' SAME TIME, WITH FOOD SPRAYING OUT OF THEIR MOUTHS... IT WAS APPALLING!
IT WAS JUST A NORMAL DISCUSSION... WE'RE A PASSIONATE PEOPLE!
GROSS
LIPSTICK ON EVERYTHING
IT'S A CRYIN' SHAME THERE'S NO FUNDING FOR AMTRAK... ALOTTA THINGS ARE FALLING APART ON THIS TRAIN!
YEAH! MY COMPARTMENT'S ALL DIRTY AND GRIMY. I WIPED ALL THE SURFACES, THAT SHIT WAS NASTY...
HOW CAN THAT BOTHER YOU WHEN YOU LIVED IN A SQUAT IN TOTAL FILTH, AN' ATE OUT A DUMPSTERS FOR TWO YEARS??
IT'S NOT THE SAME! THIS IS LIKE FAKE-CLEAN, Y'KNOW? IT'S MORE GROSS TO ME... PLUS, YOU PAID A LOT OF MONEY FOR THIS, IT'S DISRESPECTFUL! IT PISSES ME OFF. BLA BLA BLA
HISSY RANT
AMTRAK HAS TO STOP EVERY 15 MINUTES TO LET FREIGHT TRAINS GO BY, AND SOMETIMES THEY HAVE TO GET OUT AND CHANGE THE SWITCHES BY HAND! NOT LIKE THE OLD DAYS!
NOTHING BUT CORN AND SOYBEANS OUT THERE NOW... WE MUST BE GETTING CLOSE!
WOW, COOL! LOOKIT THOSE BEAUTIFUL OLD ABANDONED CABOOSES AND BOXCARS!! OOOH!
I HOPE THE CRUMBS AREN'T A BUNCH OF RIGHT-WING REPUBLICAN FUNDAMENTALIST ANTI-SEMITIC BIGOTS...*
CLICK CLICK
(NO, BEEP BEEP)
*EXAGGERATED PARANOIA OF LEAVING "CIVILIZED" URBAN AREAS!
NEXT DAY AT THE REUNION, ALINE KINDA STANDS OUT, BUT SOPHIE BLENDS RIGHT IN, IN SPITE OF HER MULTIPLE TATTOOS!
NOW, THAT'S A CRUMB KID!
EXCEPT FOR THE SHNOZZ! HA
I TRIED TO DRESS DOWN, I HOPE THEY LIKE ME!
HI! I'M CHUCK'S SON ROBBIT'S WIFE!
HELL BOY
THEY'RE ALL WEARING LIGHT BLUE AN' BEIGE! IT MUST BE GENETIC...
OF COURSE, I WANTED TO LOOK MY BEST, I DON'T WANT THEM TO THINK I DON'T CARE!


I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M EVEN INDIRECTLY RELATED TO THESE PEOPLE! I'M AFRAID THEY'LL THINK I'M AN IMPOSTOR AN' KICK ME OUT!
Hi! i'm CHUCK'S GRAND-DAUGHTER!
OOH, MY GOODNESS, WILL YA LOOK AT THAT! IT'S UNCLE CHUCK'S GRANDKID!! OOH OH.
WELCOME HOME, SWEETIE! IT'S SO WONDERFUL TO MEET YOU...
OH-MY-GOD! I HAVE NORMAL, WHOLESOME, WHITE (SO WHITE!), ALL-AMERICAN RELATIVES!! THAT-THAT... LIKE ME, ACKNOWLEDGE ME....! OH-MY-GOD! IT'S AMAZING! NORMAL! IF ONLY I HAD KNOWN... SNIFF...
THERE'S NOT ENUFF ROOM ON THE PAGE TO FIT IN ALL THE CHOTCHKIES HANGIN' OFFA ME IN REAL LIFE!
OF COURSE, THERE WAS A ROOM FULL OF TABLES LOADED DOWN WITH FOOD! 'TWAS EVER THUS!
I TOOK ONE LOOK AT THE ROASTED HOG AN' MADE A BEELINE FOR THE DESSERT TABLE!
OH MY GOD! THIS RICE PUDDING IS TRULY THE FINEST I'VE EVER HAD!
THERE'S LIKE A KILO OF MAYO IN EACH OF THOSE BOWLS!
HEY, SOPHIE! LET'S GO SMOKE A BOWL AND DRAG THE 4x4!!
SURE!
I GUESS THAT'S WHY THEY MADE THE MAYO CLINIC NEAR HERE!
I'VE ALREADY SCARFED DOWN FIVE DIFFERENT KINDSA PIES!!
EATS TOO FAST EVEN THO' THERE'S TONS OF FOOD...
AND I THOUGHT MY COUSINS WOULD BE A BUNCHA REPUBLICAN CHEERLEADERS ON SPEED! WHEW
R. RECONNECTS WITH HIS LONG-LOST RELATIVES, SUCH AS COUSIN SCOTT, WHOM HE HADN'T SEEN SINCE 1952!
S'BEEN A LONG TIME, HUH, SCOTT?
YEP, SURE HAS!
THEY'RE LIKE CREEPY CLONES!
TH' COUSIN IS SLIGHTLY MORE MARFANNED* OUT THAN BOB!
SPEECHLESSLY WEIRDED OUT!
S-SANDALS AND SOCKS!!?
DAD?
*MARFAN SYNDROME: LOOK IT UP IN THE MERCK MANUAL!
Y'WANT TO PLAY SOME OLD-TIME MUSIC?
OKAY...
THE SIMILARITY IN THEIR APPEARANCE BROUGHT EMBARRASSING ATTENTION TO THE TWO SHY MEN, AND A LOT OF PICTURE-TAKING.
SAME PROTRUDING ADAM'S APPLE
SAME HUNCHED-UP POSTURE
WEARING IDENTICAL BAGGY PANTS TOO HIGH AT THE WAIST
ONE LIVES IN A REMOTE CORNER OF NORTHERN MINNESOTA
ONE LIVES IN A MEDIEVAL VILLAGE IN FRANCE
ALINE SITS DOWN TO LISTEN TO THE MUSIC, TAWKIN' WITH A FAKE MIDWEST ACCENT & TRYING TO ACT LIKE A REGULAH GAL...
BOY, OH BOY, THIS FARM-FRESH PIE IS SOME MIGHTY GOOD EATIN' OVAH HEAH!
CHECK OUT TH' SIZE OF THOSE TWO GUYS' ADAM'S APPLES!
YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS!
NO, WHAT?
WE DID A SURVEY BACK WHEN WE WERE IN COLLEGE...
HO BOY! WE WERE WILD BACK THEN!
WE FOUND A DIRECT CORRELATION BETWEEN TH' SIZE OF THE ADAM'S APPLE AND THE SIZE OF THE PENIS!
OH, GOLLY-GOSH, I NEVER HEARD THAT BEFORE... GUESS I'VE LIVED A SHELTERED LIFE!
HAW HAW HAW
HAR HAR
SOBER, NEUROTIC
CHEERFUL, WELL-ADJUSTED, AND DRUNK
CONTRARY TO ALINE'S TRIBAL FEARFULNESS, THE CRUMBS TURNED OUT TO BE AN ECCENTRIC, MOSTLY LIBERAL, OPEN-MINDED, AND RELAXED CLAN.


OH LOOK! FINALLY, SOMEONE'S DRESSED LIKE ME!
HA-HA... WE'RE VERY PROUD OF HER!
WHAT'S THAT LITTLE BOX AROUND HER NECK?
OH LORD!
R.'S SISTER CAROL
OH, THAT'S A SHOCK BOX TO STOP HER FROM BARKING... YOU JUST ZAP HER WITH THIS REMOTE IF SHE DISOBEYS... IT'S VERY EFFECTIVE!
WHATAYA MEAN?
I GOTTA GET ONE 'A THOSE FOR ALINE!
TA-HA-HA-HA
JESUS GOD!
R. TALKS TO UNCLE MAC ABOUT FARMING...
MAC, I HEARD YOU JUST SOLD YOUR FARM LAST WEEK!
OH YAH... I SOLD IT TO A GUY WHO OWNS 25,000 ACRES AND EMPLOYS ONLY SIX MEN TO WORK IT! THAT'S NOT RIGHT! USED TO BE A HUNDRED FARMS! THAT'S NOT RIGHT!
DESPITE ALL THE INDULGENT EATING THE CRUMBS ARE A WIRY LOT, BUT THEY TEND TO MATE WITH ROBUST, DEMONSTRATIVE TYPES... THERE WAS A LOT OF HUGGING GOING ON...
GIMME A HUG!
R.'S UNTOUCHY-FEELY SISTER CAROL COULDN'T HANDLE IT...
IF ONE MORE PERSON TRIES TO HUG ME, I'M GONNA SLUG 'EM, I SWEAR TO GOD!
OH, COME ON, CAROL! BETTER TO BE OVER-HUGGED THAN UNDER HUGGED!
LOVE THEM... WANNA BE LIKE THEM!
– SOPH
COUSIN DIANE, OWNS A BAR IN WASECA
XO♥X♥X♥ XO
SOPHIE IS FASCINATED BY THE OLD PHOTOS OF EARLY CRUMB FAMILY SETTLERS...
WOW, JEEZ... LOOKIT CALISTA JANE, MY GREAT-GREAT-GRANDMA... MAN, SHE'S SUCH A HARD-ASS, YOU DON'T WANNA MESS WITH HER! THE OLD-TIMERS SAY WHAT A ROUGH TOUGH OLD COWGIRL SHE WAS! SIGH... THIS IS HER FARM!
SHE WAS ALLEGEDLY HALF AMERICAN INDIAN
CIRCA 1860S
HERE'S THE ONLY PHOTO OF MY GREAT-GREAT-GRANDFATHER EDWIN AUGUSTUS CRUMB. HE WAS MARRIED TO CALISTA JANE. LOOK, SOPH, HE LOOKS JUST LIKE ME WITHOUT MY GLASSES!
CRAZY! YOU LOOK MORE LIKE HIM THAN LIKE YOUR FATHER. IT'S UNCANNY... HOW THE CRUMB GENES STAY IN THE FAMILY LIKE THAT... BUNCHA TURKEY-NECK, FARM-BOY GOYIM... I MEAN, NO ONE GOT YOUR MOTHER'S LEPRECHAUN GENES! WHY?
SHORT SQUAT IRISH
SAME ANXIETY-RIDDEN, BONY FRIGHTENED, ECTO-MORPHIC VISAGE... DIED OF CONSUMPTION AT AGE 51


THERE WERE MANY POIGNANT MOMENTS, SUCH AS THE VISIT TO THE OLD FAMILY BURIAL GROUND.
I'M KEEPING THIS NAME FOR MY FUTURE DAUGHTER!
AW!
AN EMPTY PLOT AWAITS ME IN THE NIGHTMARISH BETH DAVID CEMETERY IN ELMONT, LONG ISLAND!
CALISTA JANE 1831-1918
DAD, DONTCHYA WANNA PAY YOUR RESPECKS TO YOUR DAD??
BAH! HE'S LONG GONE... HE WAS AN ATHEIST...HE USED TO SAY TO US, "WHEN YOU'RE DEAD, YOU'RE DEAD, THAT'S IT!"
GHOD I NEVAH SAW THEM EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS LIKE THIS BEFAW. IT'S WEIRD...
AHEM!
SNURK
DAMN... YOU COLD!
...HI, GRANDPA CHUCK. GOOD TO MEET YOU... WISH I COULD'VE SAW YOU ALIVE.
U.S. MARINE CORPS
CHARLES VINCENT CRUMB 1914-1982
THIS PLACE IS BEAUTIFUL AND MOVING. MY DAD'S DAD AND HIS DAD BEFORE HIM ALL SAID THAT THE SOUND OF THE WIND IN THE TREES IS WHAT THEY REMEMBER MOST FROM HERE... ...NOTHING BUT CORNFIELDS AROUND HERE. IT'S A DEEP, HAUNTING PLACE.
THIS FLAT, SOLITARY, WINDSWEPT PLACE APPEALS TO ME...IT MUST BE IN THE BLOOD...
BRR... TOO COLD AN' LONELY FOR ME!
CUTE KNEES —R.C.
GROUP PHOTO TAKEN AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE CRUMB FARM...
I FEEL SO STRANGE, ILL AT EASE STANDING BEHIND A WAGON WHEEL!
I'M DRUNK AN' KINDA WANNA GIT ON ONE O' THEM FREIGHT TRAINS, BUT EH... ASIDE FROM THAT I FEEL PERFECTLY COMFORTABLE HERE ON THE FARM!
CRUMB FARM EST. 1878
IN COLUMBUS, WISCONSIN, WAITING FOR THE TRAIN BACK TO NEW YORK...
THAT WAS THE BEST RICE PUDDING I EVER ATE!
I NEED A DAIRY DELIGHT AN' A POWER YOGA CLASS!
LOWWNSOME RAILROOOAD I'M A RAMBLIN' WOMIN AND I'M WALKIN ON DOWN THE LINE AWHEEEUH
PTOOEY
I WAS REALLY GOOD ON THIS TRIP, WASN'T I? I LET YOU TALK TO YOUR COUSIN IN THE CAR... IT WAS HARD, MY PERSONALITY IS LIKE GAS, I CAN'T HOLD IT IN!
LOVIN' IT
END

THE CRITICS



BOOKS

WORKS ON PAPER

The letters of Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell.

BY DAN CHIASSON

In 1947, Elizabeth Bishop published "At the Fishhouses," in this magazine. Among those who admired the poem was her new friend the poet Robert Lowell. "I liked your *New Yorker* fish poem," he wrote. "I am a fisherman myself, but all my fish become symbols, alas!" Bishop, who was staying at the time in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, had written to Lowell of the region's marvellous bird life, "auks and the only puffins left on the continent, or so they tell us . . . real ravens on the beach . . . enormous, with sort of rough black beards under their beaks." In response, Lowell lamented, "Puffins are in my book of New England birds, but I've never seen one." As for Nova Scotia, he recalled it as the site of a bad trout-fishing expedition with his grandfather, including a "horrible after sea-sick feeling" and a few "dismal low-tide gulls."

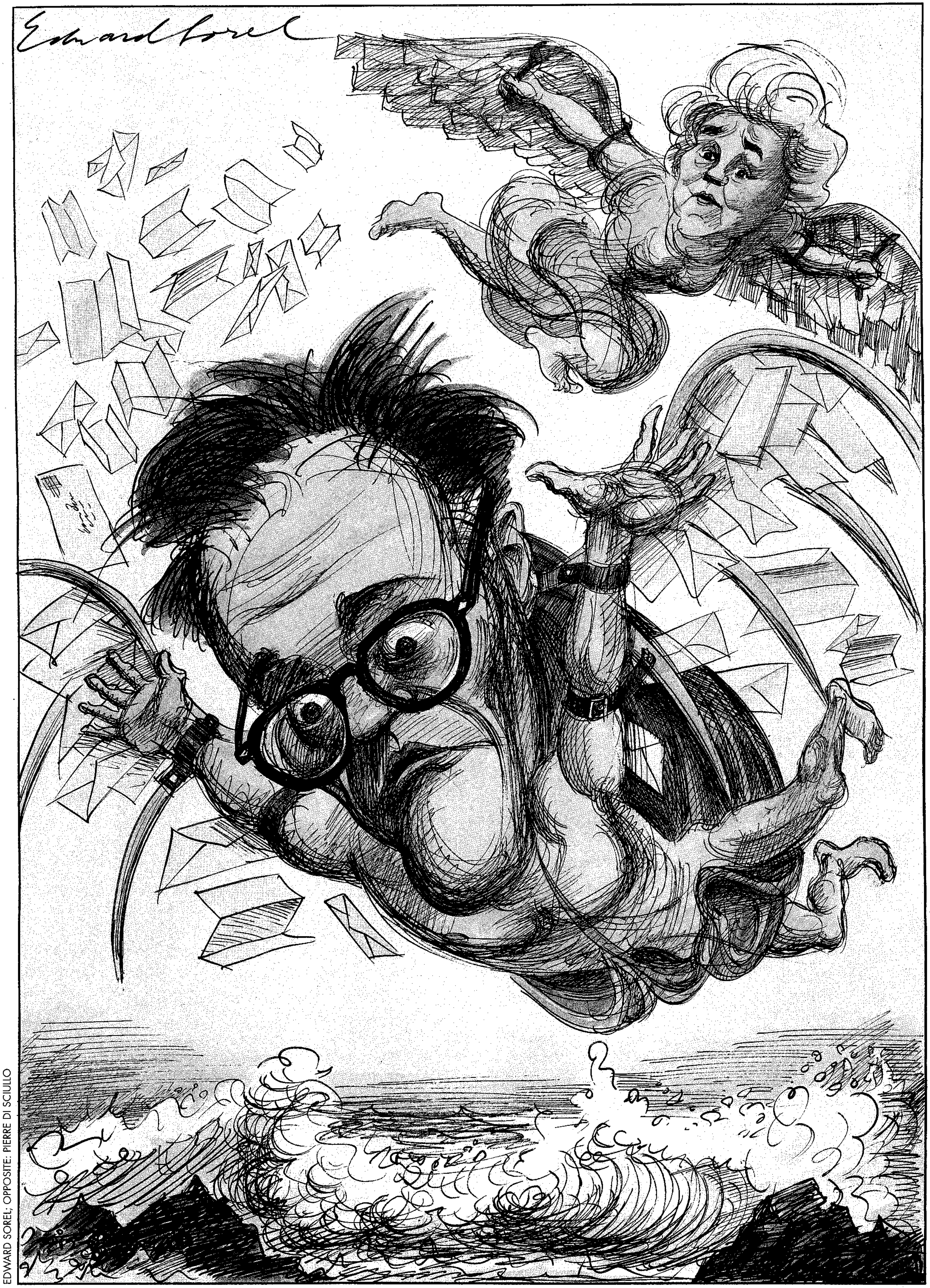
From the start, Lowell and Bishop were intent on being a mismatch. When Lowell invited Bishop to visit him in Washington, where he was serving as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress (a post that we now call "Poet Laureate"), she informed him that she would be travelling there with her pet canary. Staying at the home of Pauline Hemingway in Key West and deep in what she called her "female Hemingway" phase, Bishop wrote of catching amberjack and jewfish. Lowell, fresh from charming William Carlos Williams's ninety-one-year-old mother, responded that he had once "tried swimming" but "was nearly drowned and murdered by children with foot-flippers and helmets and a ferocious mother doing the crawl." The critic John Thompson recalls his friend Lowell lying in bed all day writing poems, surrounded by a "tumble-down brick wall" composed of "his Greek Homer, his Latin Vergil, his Chaucer, letters from Boston, cast-off socks, his Dante, his Milton." Bishop once interrupted a letter to witness the birth of a calf in a nearby field. These differences, sharpened for each other's amusement, made them ideal trading partners. Lowell, the literary fisherman, sent a copy of "The Compleat Angler" to Bishop in Key West, keeping the motif alive. When he absent-mindedly put away a lit cigarette in his pocket, nearly setting himself on fire, Bishop mailed him a "SAFE if not particularly esthetic ashtray."

They shared the tiny poetry orbit of stipends and seminars and itinerant jobs, but when it came to seeing each other they specialized in near-misses. Lowell's first-ever letter to Bishop rues the fact that he had already narrowly missed seeing her on three occasions. When Bishop was at Harvard to record her poems for the Woodberry Poetry Room, she listened to Lowell's recording of his poems, made there a year earlier. One season it was Lowell's turn in Washington, calling on Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeths Hospital, and then it was Bishop's, bringing Pound a bottle of cologne. When Bishop wrote of blowing bubbles on the balcony outside her magnificent room at Yaddo, the artists' colony in Saratoga Springs, Lowell wrote that he thought he had stayed in that room, too, and reminisced about games of croquet. "We seem attached to each other by some stiff piece of wire," he wrote, "so that each time one moves, the other moves in another direction." They spent their lives begging each other to visit, but when the opportunity presented itself they conspired with almost comic transparency in setting up obstacles.

Seeing each other more often would have given them less time to write, less to write about, and, since letters exist in reciprocal terms, less to read. As it is, "Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell," edited by Thomas Travisano, with Saskia Hamilton (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $45), takes up more than nine hundred pages. Like Victorians hungry for the next installment of a serialized novel, the two looked to each other's letters for sustenance. "I've been reading Dickens, too," Bishop wrote, as though confirming the scope and flavor of the correspondence, the "abundance" and "playfulness" that she ascribed to Dickens. The letters abound in Dickensian caricature, mostly gentle and humane. "Several weird people have shown up here," Lowell wrote from Washington, including a Dr. Swigget with a terza-rima rendering of Dante and an aspiring writer named "Major Dyer, who takes Pound ice-cream, was a colleague of Patton's and teaches Margaret Truman fencing."

They were also adroit self-satirists. The poetry they perfected, so different in so many ways, shares a nearly absurdist attitude toward the self. Bishop, in "The Gentleman of Shalott," imagined herself as a man (she often chose male personae) standing with half his body in the mirror and half out. Lowell, in poem after poem, finds himself reflected in unlikely ways. A late poem called "Shaving" describes his face "aslant" like a "carpenter's problem," and in "Waking in the Blue" he sees himself "before the metal shaving mirrors" of the insane asylum:

Through Lowell's dizzying psychological dramas and fits of despair, Bishop remained a steadfast but unsparing correspondent.



Edward Sorel

EDWARD SOREL; OPPOSITE: PIERRE DI SCIULLO

"You might need this."

• •

After a hearty New England breakfast,
I weigh two hundred pounds
this morning. Cock of the walk,
I strut in my turtle-necked French sailor's jersey

The poem, written during one of Lowell's stays at McLean Hospital, outside Boston, takes a scrupulously external view: he's just another one of the Brahmin "old-timers" holding a "locked razor."

"It's funny at my age to have one's life so much in and on one's hands," Lowell wrote. Bishop responded by quoting her Maine hairdresser: "Kind of awful, ain't it, ploughing through life alone." They were introduced in 1947 at a dinner party thrown by Randall Jarrell in New York. Bishop recalled, "It was the first time I had ever talked to some one about how one writes poetry." She found that talking with Lowell, who struck her as "handsome in an old-fashioned poetic way," was "strangely easy, 'like exchanging recipes for a cake.' " It had been a strange, lonely interval for them both. Lowell was twenty-nine and coming out of his disastrous first marriage, to the novelist Jean Stafford. (Stafford had sued him, before they were married, after he permanently injured her face in a car crash. Things went downhill from there.) Bishop was turning thirty-six, and her relationship with Marjorie Stevens, from Key West, was coming to an end. Lowell's "Lord Weary's Castle" and Bishop's "North & South" had just been published to acclaim. (Lowell collected a Pulitzer Prize for his book; he was among the youngest poets ever to receive one. Bishop won the Pulitzer nine years later, for her second book.) Bishop was writing poems along with autobiographical stories and sketches, while Lowell was wringing out of his early style the long, hysterical poem "The Mills of the Kavanaughs," a daily task that he greeted with expanding dread.

Bad childhoods are a human misfortune, but for writers they are often a stroke of luck. Both Lowell and Bishop were aware that growing up lonely sponsored their imaginative lives. In the seventies, Lowell, in his great poem "Ulysses and Circe," chose a baffled and emasculated Ulysses for his self-portrait. A few years earlier, Bishop, in "Crusoe in England," had picked, for hers, a retired Robinson Crusoe nostalgic for his island days.

Both were ways of representing an essential strandedness that had its origins in childhood. Lowell was the unwanted only child of a belittling mother and a father who grew, in Lowell's eyes, "apathetic and soured." Bishop's father had died when she was eight months old. When she was five, her mother was placed permanently in a sanitarium. Bishop never saw her again, though her mother lived nearly twenty more years. Bishop was then subjected to several experiments in child rearing. She was happy in Nova Scotia with her mother's parents, but her father's parents, burghers in Worcester, Massachusetts, felt they could provide better for her. That arrangement soon failed, and she was sent to live with her aunt Maud, in Revere, Massachusetts. Maud nursed her back from the ailments she suffered in Worcester: asthma, bronchitis, eczema, symptoms of St. Vitus' dance, and allergies to practically everything in her grandparents' house. (Later, reading Proust, she discovered a voluble fellow asthma sufferer and decided wryly that she hadn't "capitalized" enough on her condition.) Aunt Maud had pet canaries and Italian neighbors with beautiful surnames that Bishop never forgot.

Poets live on two tracks: on one, life chugs along in the usual ways. On the other, art, which starts late but soon catches up, has its own landmarks and significant episodes. Interiority isn't mapped by biographical fact; that happens on the other track. And so "life" is an exceedingly difficult and unpromising subject for art. Bishop aimed for a dispassionate, even eerie objectivity, an effect that was incompatible with autobiographical writing. Lowell, the gifted parodist of persons and manners, found it comparatively easy to turn to his own person and manners, but in doing so he risked giving up the dazzling special effects of his early, Miltonic poems.

Compared with all the grand things that people have done with poems—justifying the ways of God to men, shoring fragments against their ruins, and so on—telling one's life story in more or less factual terms might seem to be a very modest goal. But Lowell was obsessed by the idea that this could be done without sacrificing poetry's ambition, its power and sweep. "Confessional" poetry—a brand inadvertently launched by Lowell's groundbreaking 1959 book, "Life Studies"—is in his practice really self-satire with the sadness left in. Bishop had a distaste for the "suffering business" of confessional poetry, but she loved "Life Studies," and thinking about why she loved it helped her define her own, very different method:

> I am green with envy of your kind of assurance. I feel that I could write in as much detail about my Uncle Artie, say—but what would be the significance? Nothing at all. He became a drunkard, fought with his wife, and spent most of his time fishing . . . and was ignorant as sin. . . . Whereas all you have to do is put down the names! And the fact that it seems significant, illustrative, American, etc., gives you, I think, the confidence you display about tackling any idea or theme, *seriously*, in both writing and conversation. In some ways you are the luckiest poet I know!

No poet wants to hear that he is lucky, and Lowell never responded to this rather damning praise. What makes him a great poet isn’t confidence about his own centrality but his yearning, brilliantly expressed throughout his work, for rest, for peace, for an integrated life. “I am tired,” he wrote. “Everyone’s tired of my turmoil.”

“Words in Air” may be the only book of its precise kind ever published: the lifelong correspondence between two artists of equal genius. Lowell and Bishop lived various, tumultuous lives, and yet sometimes it feels as if the outside world existed primarily to be fattened up for their letters. A new sight calls for a new sentence, a night out conjures a new paragraph, a new home calls for a new letter or series of letters capturing, by a kind of demented entomology, every last scurrying detail. They were both collectors by nature. At nineteen, Lowell, a Harvard freshman, wrote of his “violent passions” for collecting: “tools; names of birds; marbles; catching butterflies, snakes, turtles etc; buying books on Napoleon.” From Europe, he writes to Bishop, “We went everywhere. . . . I can’t resist putting down the names.” A list of thirty place names, starting with Naples and ending with Eton, follows.

Bishop, too, connects description with irrational compulsion. “I find it hard to stop when I get to describing,” she writes from Brazil, where she lived for more than a decade, and where her hostess, soon to be her girlfriend, Lota de Macedo Soares, is “building an ultra modern house”:

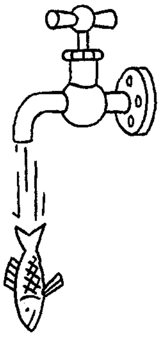
> The house is unfinished and we are using oil-lamps, no floors—just cement covered with dogs’ footprints. The “family” has consisted of another American girl, also a N.Y. friend of mine, 2 Polish counts for a while, the architect over week-ends etc., all a strange tri- or quadri-lingual hodgepodge that I like very much. . . . I like to cook, etc., but I’m not used to being confronted with the raw materials, all un-shelled, unblanched, un-skinned, or un-dead. Well, I can cook goat now—with wine sauce.

The letter billows onward for pages, detail upon detail, before ending with the announcement “I have a TOUCAN—named Uncle Sam in a chauvinistic outburst.” When Bishop runs out of words, she draws a picture. When the occasion demands it, she switches ribbons on her typewriter and prints in red.

The result is exhilarating, consistently so, for hundreds of pages at a time. But the torrential incisiveness can also be wearying. You’d like to spend a little more time with those dogs’ footprints on the cement floor, but you can’t get off the treadmill of associations, from the Polish counts to the architect, from the goat to the wine sauce. This isn’t writing: it’s out-writing, and the spectacle of two brilliant out-writers grinding each other down over thirty years is astounding. Just when you think someone will surrender, he or she doubles down, as when Lowell antes his trip to Swarthmore against Bishop’s trip to the Amazon:

> What tremendous descriptions in your letter! The sick man on the amazon, the monks and nuns and Lota, the sacred heart on your bosom. I have nothing to reply with except a prosaic trip to Swarthmore. I was visiting a minute, intelligent dry poet, Daniel Hoffman, midway in a book on vegetation and other myths in Melville, Hawthorne, James, Faulkner, etc. and the American humorists, and all the way through a dry intelligent, unreadable book of vegetation myths, poems in strange ballad meters and the alliterative stanza of Sir Gawain. Exquisite Shaker and European baroque and Swarthmore stone house; nervous, charming near-sighted wife, poetry-editor for the *Ladies Home Journal* (ten dollars a line). . . . After their huge cocktail party, I asked them who was interesting and they said, “We are.”

Who needs the Amazon when you have Swarthmore? Hoffman has gone on to have a distinguished career as a poet, but it scarcely matters: Lowell’s combustible triple adjectives (minute, intelligent, dry) are the road flares that mark Hoffman’s limits. “I don’t know why I’ve stuffed this all in,” Lowell concludes, “except to plaintively suggest that even here one can see the world in a grain of sand.”



It must have seemed unreal to them to see one another in person. Few photographs of them together exist; the most famous ones were taken in Rio de Janeiro. In one, they wade together on a beach; in the other, they eye each other abashedly. The correspondence seems to be a counter-life richer than any lived one: how could it be made to accommodate the stubborn impediments of actual life? When Lowell’s mother makes a three-month visit to him and Elizabeth Hardwick, his second wife, in Europe, Lowell writes only after they’ve returned, as though newly consecrating the page: “Now it’s over; we have emerged triumphantly” from three months of “behaving very badly, then being very self-sacrificing,” all the while “fuming inside like the burning stuffings of an overstuffed Dutch chair.” When his father dies, he accelerates rapidly past the news and talks about his travel plans. When Bishop writes back, she says nothing about his father’s death. When Lowell’s mother dies, in 1954, in Rapallo, Italy, Lowell arrives to collect her corpse and then, as he writes to Hardwick, spends the morning “weeping & weeping” in the room with it. When he returns to America, he has a manic attack, writes a poem in Pound’s style about Hitler that he then sends to Pound, and reaffirms to Hardwick that he wants to marry his Italian mistress. Again waiting until he has recovered (even though he wrote many letters when he was ill), Lowell writes to Bishop in November of that year, “I have been sick again, and somehow even with you I shrink both from mentioning and not mentioning.” He goes on:

> These things come on with a gruesome, vulgar, blasting surge of “enthusiasm,” one becomes a kind of man-aping balloon in a parade—then you subside and eat bitter coffee-grounds of dullness, guilt etc.

The metaphors capture the illness. The manic self is an inflated “man-aping balloon in a parade”—oversized, grotesque, dangerous. “Man-aping” echoes the word “mania,” while the flaccid self sits in recovery, eating morning-after “coffee-grounds” of guilt. But the successful transformation of illness into metaphor is itself a sign of recovery. Lowell’s recovery letters are among the most brilliant letters ever written, for the simple reason that the writing of them operates against such tragic stakes.

By the mid-fifties, Lowell’s manic attacks were causing boundless damage in his life and in his relationships. While teaching in Austria in 1952, he vanished for a day and was found wandering near the German border. After that, he had to be watched by American M.P.s. At the University of Cincinnati, where he had been invited to give a series of lectures, his mien at the lectern took on a menacing aspect; the English Department had to seat a human shield of large-bodied scholars in the front row for fear that he would physically attack his audience. Because he was brilliant and sui generis and not less so when he was ill, nobody was ever able to catch him in time. Mania sharpened his intellectual aim even as it blunted his censor. He left a trail of insulted hosts everywhere, and baffled girls who thought he really was going to marry them.

In 1957, Bishop and Lota de Macedo Soares visited Lowell and Hardwick and their infant daughter, Harriet, in Maine. Lowell appears to have propositioned Bishop, suggesting that he visit her alone in Boston, New York, or Brazil. Bishop, in turn, told Hardwick. The letters that follow are grandiose on Lowell's end and strategic on Bishop's; the correspondence that had sustained so many remarkable exchanges now feels like a fraying rope over an abyss. Lowell, his mania still cresting, recasts the Maine misadventure as the unstoppering of a very old bottle. "There's one bit of the past that I would like to get off my chest," he writes:

> Do you remember how at the end of that long swimming and sunning Stonington day . . . we went up to, I think, the relatively removed upper Gross house and had one of those real fried New England dinners, probably awful. And we were talking about this and that about ourselves . . . and you said rather humorously yet it was truly meant, "When you write my epitaph, you must say I was the loneliest person who ever lived." . . . I assumed that [it] would be a matter of time before I proposed and I half believed that you would accept. . . . The possible alternatives that life allows us are very few, often there must be none. . . . But asking you is *the* might have been for me, the one towering change, the other life that might have been had.

How should one take this letter? It is, of course, what one would say. Yet it is also beautifully and truthfully said, although, as he writes in a postscript, "too heatedly written with too many *ands* and so forth." Bishop responds with the name of a good analyst in Cambridge.

Reading this exchange is painful, but, oddly, it does not feel like eavesdropping. In a generally excellent introduction, Thomas Travisano, an English professor at Hartwick College, argues that Lowell's and Bishop's letters display "the apparent absence of this interest in posterity on the part of two poets famous for their obsession with craft." That's not so: even as fledglings, the two writers were the most posterity-obsessed literary creatures imaginable. No poet is obsessed with craft per se; craft is just a name for the mechanics of immortality. Travisano quotes the poet and critic Tom Paulin: "The merest suspicion that the writing is aiming beyond the addressee at posterity freezes a letter's immediacy and destroys its spirit." And yet what makes these letters so fascinating is their hawk's eye on immortality, even in the midst of lives lived fully, often sloppily. Writers like Lowell and Bishop are more human, sincere, candid—more genuine—the more ambitious they are.

The literary self-consciousness that Paulin and Travisano rule out is not just an aspect of these letters but their atmosphere and their deep subject. Lowell's "might have been" letter is, above all, a piece of writing—too heated, too many "and"s. At one point, he compares himself and Bishop to Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf. During this period, Hardwick writes to Bishop with news of Lowell's hospitalization, comparing the whole episode to a Russian novel. Lowell recalls Bishop's prophecy that he would write her epitaph. When, late in his life, Lowell and Hardwick were estranged (Lowell had married Caroline Blackwood and had a child, Sheridan, with her), Lowell used some of Hardwick's letters in his book "The Dolphin." Bishop dissented in these remarkable terms:

> One can use one's life as material—one does, anyway—but these letters—aren't you violating a trust? IF you were given permission—IF you hadn't changed them . . . etc. But *art just isn't worth that much*. I keep remembering Hopkins' marvelous letter to Bridges about the idea of a "gentleman" being the highest thing ever conceived—higher than a "Christian" even, certainly than a poet. It is not being "gentle" to use personal, tragic, anguished letters that way—it's cruel.

In a letter about the misuse of letters, Bishop asks Lowell to live up to a moral standard guaranteed by an aesthetic one: be a gentleman, like Gerard Manley Hopkins. Lowell's and Bishop's letters were themselves a long, collaborative work of art, as rich in their own way and by their own standard as the poems. But Bishop seems more concerned that Lowell had changed Hardwick's letters than that he had included them. These are the objections of an author, and one who exercised an enormous level of control over her material. That Hardwick was a fellow-writer only deepened the transgression. The idea that someone would change a letter, as Lowell did in transforming Hardwick's into poems: this was a supreme violation not only of life but of art, the art of the letter.

It was Bishop, in the end, who wrote Lowell's poetic epitaph, the beautiful elegy "North Haven," which she read on the phone to Frank Bidart soon after Lowell died, in 1977. Lowell had been a chronic, sometimes hectic reviser of his work, publishing multiple versions of many poems. This habit was anathema to Bishop, who took more than twenty-five years to write her poem "The Moose." The title of their collected correspondence is taken from Lowell's late poem about that painstaking practice:

Have you seen an inchworm crawl on a leaf,
cling to the very end, revolve in air,
feeling for something to reach to something? Do
you still hang your words in air, ten years
unfinished, glued to your notice board, with gaps
or empties for the unimaginable phrase—
unerring Muse who makes the casual perfect?

To "err" literally means, as Lowell knew, "to wander or stray"; Bishop, the great nomad, was "unerring" in her art, utterly on the right track and on that track alone. Lowell, the greatest poet ever to be descended from the high Wasp line, never too far from Boston and New York, should have been at home in the world; and yet he was restless, almost vertiginous in his sometimes self-destructive energies. Bishop equated that dangerous energy with his life. Here are the final stanzas of "North Haven":

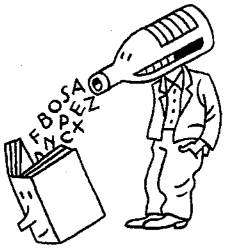
Years ago, you told me it was here
(in 1932?) you first "discovered *girls*"
and learned to sail, and learned to kiss.
You had "such fun," you said, that classic summer.
("Fun"—it always seemed to leave you at a loss. . .)

You left North Haven, anchored in its rock,
afloat in mystic blue . . . And now—you've left
for good. You can't derange, or re-arrange,
your poems again. (But the Sparrows can their song.)
The words won't change again. Sad friend, you cannot change. ◆

BRIEFLY NOTED

Tamara Drewe, *by Posy Simmonds (Mariner; $16.95).* Simmonds follows her celebrated Flaubert homage "Gemma Bovary" with a similar contemporary remake—this time, of Thomas Hardy's "Far from the Madding Crowd." Affectionately satirizing contemporary literary life, she updates Hardy's vain, ambitious beauty, Bathsheba, as Tamara, a London journalist (she's had a nose job, carries Mulberry bags, and writes a column called "Away from It All") who returns to a quiet village after her mother's death. Like Bathsheba, Tamara leaves a series of the local men in her wake, including two associated with a writer's retreat next door. Simmonds's lushly realistic drawings and complex female characters recall those of Alison Bechdel, but her learned references and her ear for a variegated British vernacular make her unique.

Burma Chronicles, *by Guy Delisle, translated from the French by Helge Dascher (Drawn & Quarterly; $19.95).* In previous graphic memoirs, Delisle, a Québécois animator, has documented in spare, whimsical black-and-white line drawings his visits to North Korea and China. Here, he turns his hand to another authoritarian Asian regime, Burma, where he spent a year after the 2004 tsunami with his wife and their infant son. Drawn with charming simplicity and brio, the book mixes traditional travelogue with glimmers of the unexpected, as when Delisle notes that in the local newspaper "some articles contain nothing but a list of officials present at a given event," or discovers a lit light bulb placed in a drawer to keep paper dry during monsoon season. Delisle takes a whimsical approach but also logs political realities—the increasing difficulty of getting travel permits for humanitarian work, the abrupt banishment of foreign videos from stores.



Bat-Manga!, *edited by Chip Kidd, Geoff Spear, and Saul Ferris, translated from the Japanese by Anne Ishii (Pantheon; $29.95).* The campy, Pop-art-infused Batman television series that débuted in 1966 was not just a hit in the U.S.; it also set off an international wave of Batmania. A Tokyo publisher licensed the comic-book rights and new weekly Batman adventures appeared for more than a year, drawn by Jiro Kuwata, a manga prodigy who co-created the popular cyborg superhero 8-Man. His work, never reprinted and previously untranslated, was so little known here that, until its rediscovery by Kidd and Ferris, even DC Comics, "Batman"'s publisher, was unaware of its existence. Kuwata, an action virtuoso, employed hypnotic geometrical motifs within his panels, incorporating realistic Batman and Robin figures into an exaggeratedly cartoonish style. His Batman fights villains like the shape-shifting Clayface and Go-Go the Magician, as well as typically Japanese oversized robots, insects, and dinosaurs.

The Nancy Book, *by Joe Brainard (Siglio; $39.50).* The guileless heroine of Ernie Bushmiller's long-running comic strip "Nancy" is an unlikely icon in contemporary art, recurring in work by postmodern cartoonists like Bill Griffith and Scott McCloud, in an Andy Warhol painting, and in rock posters by Frank Kozik. But no one put her to better use than Joe Brainard, in whose irreverent, effervescent paintings, drawings, and collages (occasionally produced in collaboration with poet friends like Ron Padgett and Frank O'Hara) Nancy appears as an ashtray; a medical illustration; the subject of pieces by de Kooning, Picasso, and Leonardo; and part of Mt. Rushmore. Updating the old "Tijuana Bibles," Brainard also gleefully depicts Nancy in flagrante delicto and tripping on hallucinogens. Brash but never bratty, fanciful without descending into preciousness, Brainard demonstrates a visual perfect-pitch equivalent to that of his miniaturist memoir-poem "I Remember."

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BOOKS

DREAMY WILDERNESS

Unmastered women in Colonial Virginia.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

Toni Morrison has a habit, perhaps traceable to the pernicious influence of William Faulkner, of plunging into the narrative before the reader has a clue to what is going on. Her newest novel, "A Mercy" (Knopf; $23.95), begins with some kind of confession from an unnamed voice, which reassures the reader:

> Don't be afraid. My telling can't hurt you in spite of what I have done and I promise to lie quietly in the dark—weeping perhaps or occasionally seeing the blood once more—but I will never again unfold my limbs to rise up and bare teeth.

We are not totally reassured. What blood? What have you (there in the dark) done? The darkness does not quickly lift: "You can think what I tell you a confession, if you like, but one full of curiosities familiar only in dreams and during those moments when a dog's profile plays in the steam of a kettle." A dog's profile does what? "That night"—what night?—"I see a minha mãe standing hand in hand with her little boy, my shoes jamming the pocket of her apron. Other signs need more time to understand."

"Minha mãe," research reveals, is Portuguese for "my mother," and in time we come to comprehend that it is 1690 in Virginia, and that the narrator is a sixteen-year-old black girl called Florens, who was, at her mother's plea, impulsively adopted, eight years ago, by a white proprietor ("Sir" to Florens), in partial settlement of a debt owed him by an insolvent slave owner from Portugal called "Senhor." This adoption constitutes the "mercy" of the novel's title. It landed Florens in a tobacco-growing homestead populated by Sir, known to the wider world as Jacob Vaark; his wife, Rebekka, a hardy and good-natured London native the servants call Mistress; Lina, short for Messalina, a Native American whose people have been decimated by a plague, and who was sold to Jacob by the Presbyterians who rescued her; and Sorrow, a "mongrelized" young woman, possibly a sea captain's daughter, who survived a shipwreck and was named Sorrow by a sawyer's wife who cared for her until passing her on to the hospitable Sir and Mistress.

When Sir dies, this household becomes a typical Toni Morrison collection of "unmastered women," each spinning "her own web of thoughts unavailable to anyone else." Their vulnerable isolation is mitigated but not wholly relieved by the presence of Scully and Willard, two indentured laborers, homosexual and white, whom Sir hired to work on his quixotically ambitious mansion. After Sir's death, they continue to work for the widow's pay. With amiable competence, the two men deliver a child that Sorrow, who watched Lina drown her firstborn, has conceived. The infant safely born, Sorrow, long addled in the head by her shipboard traumas and her illusion of an advisory companion called Twin, regains focus and, to cap this saga of freighted names, renames herself:

> She had looked into her daughter's eyes; saw in them the gray glisten of a winter sea while a ship sailed by-the-lee. "I am your mother," she said. "My name is Complete."

From her first novel, "The Bluest Eye" (1970), Morrison has worked, in line with the celebrated Faulknerian dictum that the past is not past, in a historical vein. "The Bluest Eye," bristling with sixties literary trickiness and protest, takes place in 1940-41, and includes an impressionistic map of black flight from the South during the Depression; stepping momentarily into the present, the author offers a retrospective history of the structure "on the southeast corner of Broadway and Thirty-fifth Street in Lorain, Ohio," which for the time of the narrative was occupied by the doomed and desperate family of the thorough loser Cholly Breedlove. "Sula" (1974) opens with an elegiac sketch of a black neighborhood called the Bottom and dates its chapters from 1919 to 1965. "Song of Solomon" (1977) begins four years after Lindbergh's transatlantic flight, in 1927, and "Beloved" (1987) takes place a few years after the Civil War. The shorter novels that have followed—"Jazz" (1992), "Paradise" (1997), and "Love" (2003)—share a reminiscing narrator and a sense of the bygone as reverie, a dream that it is a struggle to remember and piece together.

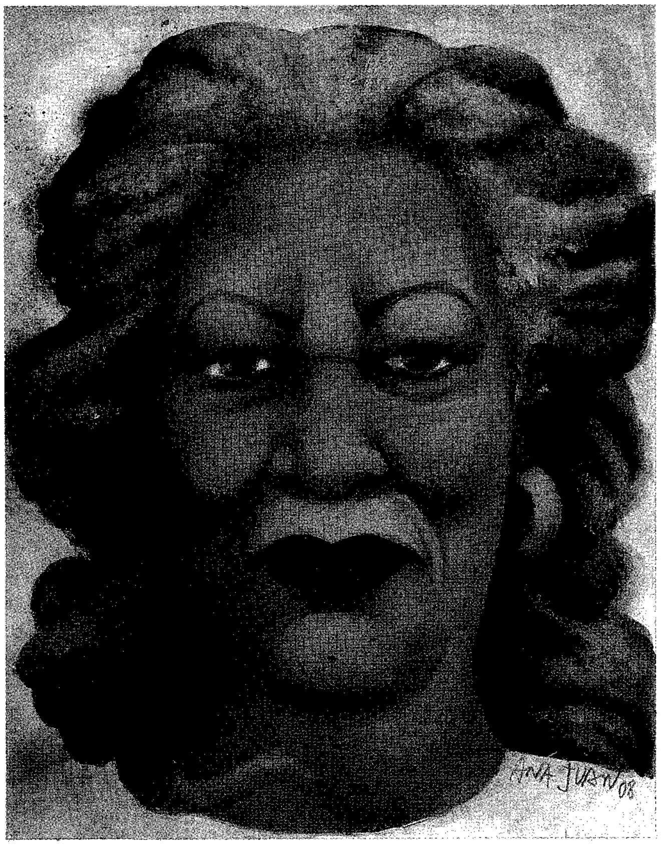
"A Mercy" takes us deeper into the bygone than any of Morrison's previous novels, into a Southern seaboard still up for grabs: "1682 and Virginia was still a mess." Indian tribes haunt the endless forest; the colonial claims of the Swedes and the Dutch have been recently repelled, and "from one year to another any stretch might be claimed by a church, controlled by a Company or become the private property of a royal's gift to a son or a favorite." Jacob Vaark, coming from England to take possession of a hundred and twenty acres bequeathed to him by an uncle he never met, rides from Chesapeake Bay into "Mary's land which, at the moment, belonged to the king. Entirely." The advantage of this private ownership is that the province allows trade with foreign markets, and Vaark is more trader than farmer at heart. The disadvantage is that "the palatinate was Romish to the core. Priests strode openly in its towns; their temples menaced its squares; their sinister missions cropped up at the edge of native villages." His claim lies in Protestant Virginia, "seven miles from a hamlet founded by Separatists" who "had bolted from their brethren over the question of the Chosen versus the universal nature of salvation."

In "A Mercy," Morrison's epic sense of place and time overshadows her depiction of people; she does better at finding poetry in this raw, scrappy colonial world than in populating another installment of her noble and necessary fictional project of exposing the infamies of slavery and the hardships of being African-American. The white characters in "A Mercy" come to life more readily than the black, and they less ambiguously dramatize America's discovery and settlement. When Vaark strides ashore through the Chesapeake surf, he is Adam treading the edge of an immense Eden:

> Fog, Atlantic and reeking of plant life, blanketed the bay and slowed him. . . . Unlike the English fogs he had known since he could walk . . . this one was sun fired, turning the world into thick, hot gold. Penetrating it was like struggling through a dream.

When Rebekka sails to join him, the indignities of steerage are made vivid—she says, "I shat among strangers for six weeks to get to this land"—as are the squalor and the gory public executions of the London she is escaping:

> The intermittent skirmishes of men against men, arrows against powder, fire against hatchet that she heard of could not match the gore of what she had seen since childhood. The pile of frisky, still living entrails held before the felon's eyes then thrown into a bucket and tossed into the Thames; fingers trembling for a lost torso; the hair of a woman guilty of mayhem bright with flame.



Morrison's novels have an epic sense of place and time.

ANA JUAN

When she disembarks in the New World, "the absence of city and shipboard stench rocked her into a kind of drunkenness that it took years to sober up from and take sweet air for granted. Rain itself became a brand-new thing: clean, sootless water falling from the sky."

In so keenly relished a near-virgin environment, the diverse "unmastered women" blend into the moonlit trees like guilty phantoms in Hawthorne. Rebekka, who had disembarked as a "plump, comely and capable" young woman, becomes Mistress, and, after gamely coping with the wilderness, the deaths of three infant children and of a five-year-old daughter, and her husband's untimely dying, takes to her bed in despair: "The wide untrammeled space that once thrilled her became vacancy. A commanding and oppressive absence." She falls ill, and orders Florens to find a free black man she thinks might cure her, a blacksmith once hired by Jacob to help build "the grandest house in the whole region"—an unfinished mansion that becomes haunted by its dead master. Florens, travelling alone through the forest primeval, finds the blacksmith living in a cabin, where he has taken in a small male foundling. He returns to Mistress, and effects a talking cure: he is asked, "Am I dying?" and answers, "No. The sickness is dead, not you." Back in the cabin, Florens proves to be a poor babysitter for the foundling and injures his arm. The blacksmith, who had been her lover, is displeased.

Much has been made of Florens's love for the blacksmith:

> The shine of water runs down your spine and I have shock at myself for wanting to lick there. I run away into the cowshed to stop this thing from happening inside me. Nothing stops it. There is only you. Nothing outside of you. My eyes not my stomach are the hungry parts of me. There will never be enough time to look at how you move.

Alternating chapters take up her stream of consciousness during the hazardous journey to deliver Mistress's message and reunite with the blacksmith. Morrison has invented for her feverish mind a compressed, anti-grammatical diction unlike any recorded patois: "Both times are full of danger and I am expel. . . . With you my body is pleasure is safe is belonging. I can never not have you have me. . . . I dream a dream that dreams back at me." But the blacksmith rebuffs her love in his own firm diction: "Own yourself, woman, and leave us be. . . . You are nothing but wilderness. No constraint. No mind." This rejection and her subsequent violence are the bitter fruit, then, of the mercy that Jacob Vaark showed her when she was eight years old.

On the book's last pages, Florens's mother somehow returns, as a disembodied voice, and recounts her enslavement in Africa ("The men guarding we and selling we are black"), the middle passage in "a house made to float on the sea," her arrival in the hot sun and cane fields of Barbados, and her "breaking in"—her rape—by white men who apologize and give her an orange as consolation. Florens and her brother resulted, and the moment of Vaark's mercy is recalled, but, in view of the dismal outcome, to sadly little point. Of the other characters, Lina remains a stoic source of domestic order and a nurturing substitute mother to Florens when she is docile, before love turns her feral. Sorrow/Complete is, in this household of orphans, the hardest to picture. By her own account, she had always lived on a ship and was brought to land by "mermaids. I mean whales." The insemination that produced her two pregnancies is mysterious, at least to me. She seems less a participant in the action than a visitor from the Land of Allegory, a "curly-haired goose girl" whose only human skills are sewing, acquired on shipboard, and, eventually, motherhood.

In the dark stew of seventeenth-century America, procreation seems the one intelligible process available to slave, servant, and mistress, and love and disease threaten to make martyrs of them all. Motherhood is so powerful a force in Morrison's universe as to be partly malevolent; its untidy agents, menstruation and sex and birth, come with a menacing difficulty. This author's early novels were breakthroughs into the experience of black Americans as refracted in the poetic and indignant perceptions of a black woman from Lorain, Ohio; as Morrison moves deeper into a more visionary realism, a betranced pessimism saps her plots of the urgency that hope imparts to human adventures. "A Mercy" begins where it ends, with a white man casually answering a slave mother's plea, but he dies, and she fades into slavery's myriads, and the child goes mad with love. Varied and authoritative and frequently beautiful though the language is, it circles around a vision, both turgid and static, of a new world turning old, and poisoned from the start. ♦

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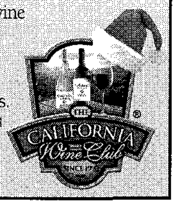

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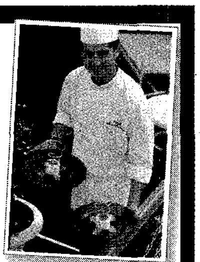

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THE ART WORLD

JUST FOR FUN

Timely retrospectives in Baltimore and New York.

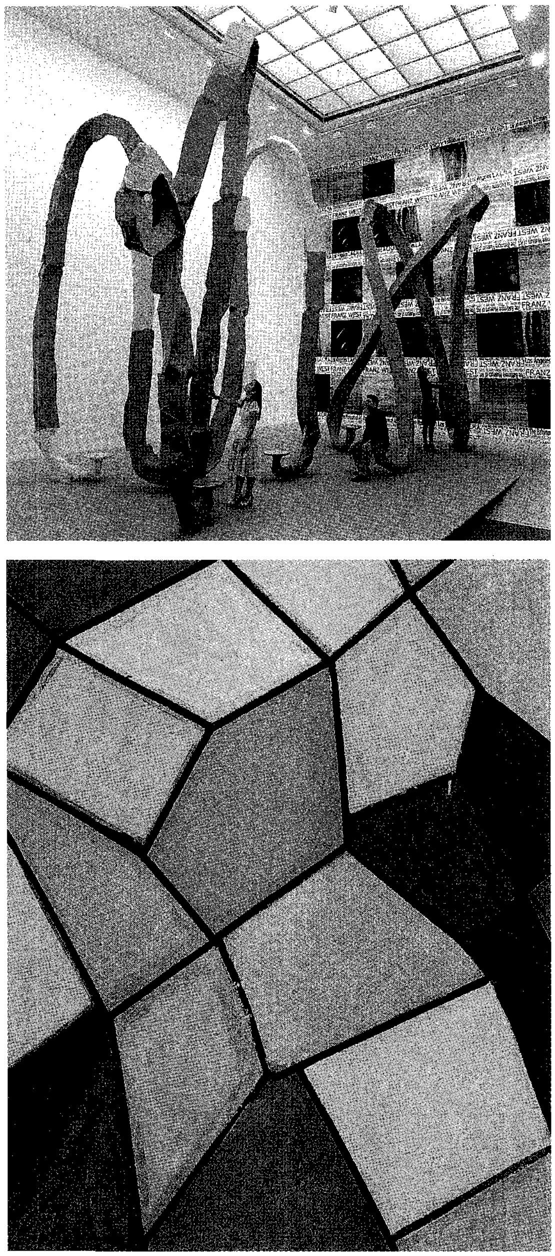
BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Retrospectives of two veteran contemporary artists who make a lot of people happy, including me, have opened, as if on order for hard times. "Franz West, To Build a House You Start with the Roof: Work 1972-2008," at the Baltimore Museum of Art, and "Mary Heilmann: To Be Someone," at the New Museum, in New York, merit, besides praise, something like pledges of allegiance. Both artists affirm values beneath and beyond the market anxieties and affiliated buzz in the art world, where they have demonstrated sturdy integrity throughout career ups and downs. West, the Viennese sculptor, collagist, and furniture-maker, is a gentle anarchist whose audience-friendly works anticipated—and considerably outshine—the recent vogue of "relational aesthetics" in international art. (I have in mind the likes of food events by Rikrit Tiravanija and interactive environments by any number of other virtual-camp counsellors.) West's please-touch-me objects dependably entertain but never seem trivial. At sixty-one, he projects the disconcerting gravitas of a serious man who is constitutionally averse to taking anything seriously. The spunky, songful, subtly disciplined informality of the American abstract painter and ceramist (and also, recently, furniture-maker) Heilmann, sixty-eight, has provided low-profile joys in art since the late nineteen-sixties. Hers is the type of art you may cherish as a touchstone of your own private taste.

West grew up in postwar Vienna, where children played in bomb ruins. "It was more than dirty—filthy," he has said. His parents were Communists. The family lived in a housing project "full of old Nazis," where his father sold coal and his Jewish mother was a dentist, working in their apartment with primitive equipment. "Every forty minutes, a new patient was screaming." He studied art intermittently while leading a life, between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five, that he describes as "pretty catastrophic"—ridden with drugs and aimless travels, amid café existentialists. He emerged on a scene dominated by the Vienna Actionists, who assaulted the complacency of their countrymen with determinedly horrific, sadomasochistic performances. In 1968, West attended an infamous event at the University of Vienna that featured the artist Gunter Brus stripping naked, cutting himself with a razor, smearing himself with excrement, and masturbating while singing the Austrian National Anthem. At the end, the Actionists solicited questions from the audience. It has very often been told that the young West broke a long, traumatized silence by rising to say, "Thank you very much. I enjoyed your performance enormously. I think these gentlemen have earned a round of applause." The tale may be apocryphal. (West says he doesn't remember it happening.) But its tone of devastating benevolence essentializes the funny, redemptive pivot that his art made in the mood and mode of Vienna's avant-garde.

West is that rarest of birds: an urbane hippie. Reportedly, his studio in Vienna is part factory, part be-in. First among equals, he channels collaborative energies. (The Baltimore show's koanlike title isn't his; the curator Darsie Alexander thought of it, and West approved.) His art enlists, rather than addresses, its viewers. His best-known works are the "Adaptives" ("Passstücke," also translatable as "Prostheses"), which he started making in 1974: odd-shaped, white-painted lumps of papier-mâché on bent steel rods, vaguely Giacometti-esque in look. They are meant to be handled. To pick one up is to become a self-conscious performer, improvising ways to hold, wield, or wear it. At the show, you may take your selected "Adaptive" into a large booth that contains a mirror and is papered with pages of the Baltimore *Examiner* from the day of the opening. (Elsewhere, a bench is supplied with each morning's Baltimore *Sun*, emphasizing a Westian time frame of incessant present-tenseness.) West's startlingly comfortable sofas, in welded rebar and cushioned or carpet-draped steel mesh, precipitate a vision of society at once domestic and public, in which everyone is both a spectator and a spectacle. Huge floor lamps in rebar supporting paint-spattered fluorescent tubes within scratched plastic cylinders are gemütlich and grand. Sublimely witty collages of painted-over images from print ads and soft-core pornography unfailingly look amateurish (not easy after years of practice). Resistance is futile. West's libidinous civility conquers all.

West's recent abstract, painted-aluminum sculptures—successors to his coarse but fragile, galumphing forms in papier-mâché—may be the most energetic and affable art for public spaces since Alexander Calder. Made of overlapping, welded patches, and coated in shiny, chipper single colors, the works suggest children's Play-Doh inspirations, with slightly naughty scatological nuances. A new, colossal piece, created for Baltimore, is West's strongest yet. "The Ego and the Id," in two parts, deploys twisting, soaring loops in various toothsome colors, and sprouts stools for sitting. Contemplating the work's echt Viennese title, I wondered which of the sections was supposed to be which. Then it came to me. Sitting on one of the stools, I was the ego, dissolving into the properly wild but—since it was socially shared and condoned—undangerous id. I remembered the hippie era, when flailingly sanguine visions of collective ecstasy sprang up and sputtered out. Forty years on, I thought, somebody has got it right.



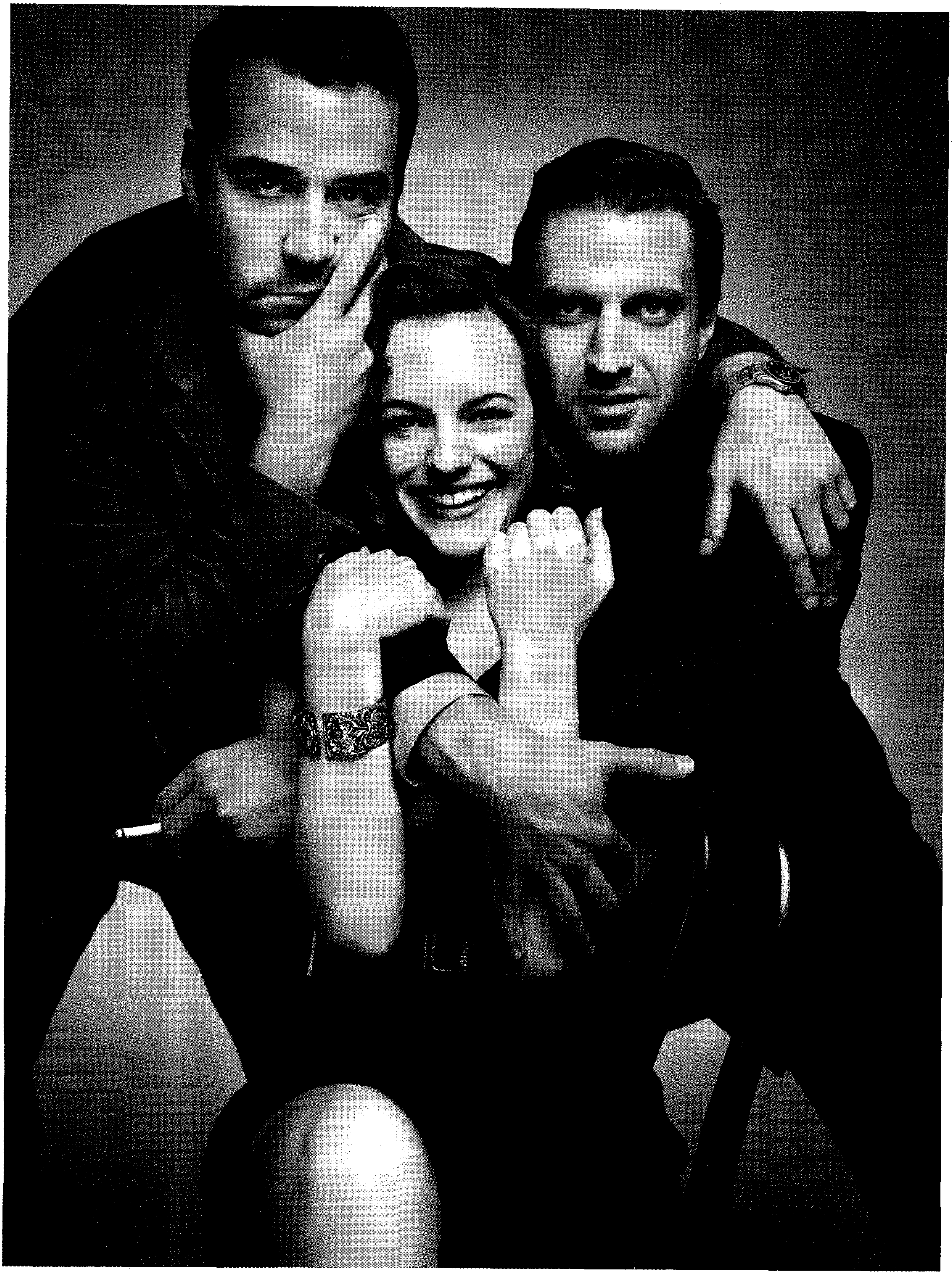
Franz West's "The Ego and the Id" (2008), top, and Mary Heilmann's "Lovejoy Jr." (2004).

TOP: © FRANZ WEST/MITRO HOOD; BOTTOM: COURTESY NEW MUSEUM

Mary Heilmann, too, has roots in the bohemian fashions and Arcadian deliriums of the sixties. She testifies to having been a wannabe "Beat chick" and a bona-fide beach girl while growing up first in San Francisco, then in Southern California, and then in San Francisco again. She studied literature (she is a zesty writer), ceramics, and sculpture, in which she earned a master's degree at Berkeley, in 1967. One of her paintings, a parfait of splotchy stripes in pink, black, yellow, watery green, and magenta, is titled "Surfing on Acid" (2005). But art, not life style, fired her intense ambition. She was friends, early on, with Bruce Nauman and Richard Serra. She moved to New York in 1968 to hang out with Donald Judd and Robert Smithson and other "big boys" of minimalism and emerging post-minimalism, on the exclusive second floor of Max's Kansas City. But she was not a social success. Choosing to paint got her scorned in those painting-allergic circles, though persisting with it made her tough. This grounding accounts for a subliminal sense of steely intelligence in works of ostensibly carefree spontaneity. There is a conjectural air to her enterprise.

Generally fast and loose, Heilmann's paintings have many looks: Abstract Expressionist, à la Mark Rothko or Joan Mitchell; geometric, in neo-Neo-Plasticist veins; color-fieldish; minimalistically grid-based; experimental, with shaped canvases and multi-panelled formats; and handsomely declarative, like something by the masterly Ellsworth Kelly (who recently was quoted as saying, "I've always felt that Mary Heilmann is the best of the new abstractionists"). She is a formalist impatient with formal consistency. When she lingers with any one sort of picture, it is usually because she is smitten by a certain combination of colors: seaside blue and white, punkish pink and black, Mexican-serape-like polychrome, or jangling tertiaries derived from the television palette of "The Simpsons." ("Lovejoy Jr." was inspired by the parody of stained-glass windows in the cartoon family's church.) Heilmann's most unmistakable quality is an insouciant disregard for the compressive limit of the canvas edge, which points up her experience as a glazer of the continuous surfaces of pots and cups, lots of which are in the show. Big, fluid strokes often seem to sail, albeit invisibly, into surrounding space. When she does emphasize the edge, with framing bands of color, it's as if she were observing the arbitrary rules of a rather silly but interesting game.

Franz West will surely like Heilmann's armchairs. Free for the sitting—and for the scooting around, on speedy casters—they are rectilinear, with wooden frames, in a direct steal from the punitively strict furniture designs of Donald Judd. But their inserted bottoms and backs, of interwoven cloth straps in typically surprising colors, are canted at body-welcoming angles. To sit in one is to feel, physically, a quiddity of the Heilmann-esque. (A funny thing about chairs: to use them is to lose sight of them.) They are about style, while skittishly refusing to vote for one style or another. The show's title, "To Be Someone," comes into poetic focus: be yourself, be anybody, be everyone by turns or at once, relax into restlessness. ♦



Jeremy Piven, Elisabeth Moss, and Raúl Esparza in David Mamet's Hollywood drama. Photograph by Max Vadukul.

THE THEATRE

FEVER PITCH

The art of selling in "Speed-the-Plow."

BY HILTON ALS

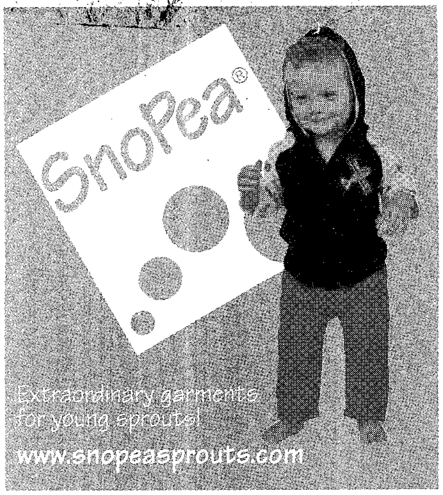
Among the many terrible realities to which David Mamet exposes us in his exceptional, calculated work, one theme stands out: suckers will never get a break in this wretched world. In the sixty-year-old playwright's fictional universe, the humane are too soft and dim-witted to survive; their tormentors chew them up with dry relish. Mamet treats the stage as a kind of bloody forum; the gladiators one finds there are skinny con artists, callow film producers, real-estate agents in cheap suits, and ghastly lovers who spar, using the author's hyper-stylized language as both spear and shield. Even to refer to some of Mamet's characters as "lovers" feels wrong—like calling a thief a victim. Mamet's protagonists do not love; they size each other up and assess what they can extract from each other—and the answer is usually money. If they show any physical tenderness at all, it's brief; they kiss, then withdraw, constantly reminding themselves of the primary rule of survival: Get or be gotten.

In Mamet's 1985 play "The Shawl," Miss A, a single woman, goes to a psychic for advice. It's unclear what she wants to hear from the medium, a con man named John, but that scarcely matters; what interests John is how Miss A thinks. "I'm not looking for a feeling—I'm looking for an equation," Mamet told John Lahr for a 1997 profile in this magazine. John the faux psychic, talking to his protégé, Charles, echoes his creator's point of view:

> JOHN: Look at her. (*Pause.*) She is unmarried. At her time in life. Why? She is bound. To what? An unresolved event. Her mother's death? Her question, she would ask the "spirit world," her mother left a fortune to her stepfather. Should she contest this will in the courts. Is this a question for the mystic? No. It hides a deeper one: this: how can I face my betrayal. How can I obtain revenge. Against the dead. Or: why did my mother not love me more? And so we help her. To *answer* that *last* question.
>
> CHARLES: And how is it we do that?
>
> JOHN: By telling her what she wants to know.
>
> CHARLES: And what is that?
>
> JOHN: We don't know. We'll listen and she'll tell us . . . tomorrow.

It turns out that, as far as Miss A is concerned, John's "equation" is a bit off. When she hands him a copy of a photograph, he identifies it as an image of her mother—erroneously. Miss A busts him, exclaiming, "THAT'S NOT HER PHOTOGRAPH. I TOOK IT FROM A BOOK. . . . How can you *prey* on me? Is there no *mercy* in the world?" But Miss A's cry against injustice is also a kind of con. She's no victim. She needs John's lies, so long as she can control *which* lies he tells her. In a 1997 *Paris Review* interview, Mamet admitted to being attracted to con men and tricksters as characters, because he'd "always been fascinated by the picaresque." And, of course, making theatre is a kind of con as well. "The process of magic and the process of confidence games, and to a certain extent the process of drama, are all processes of autosuggestion," Mamet said. "They cause the audience to autosuggest themselves in a way which seems perfectly logical, but is actually false." But are feelings—the emotional lives of the audience, let alone of the characters—always something to be manipulated, in Mamet's world?

The alienation we feel at the end of "The Shawl" is taken one step further in Mamet's 1988 three-character study, "Speed-the-Plow" (in revival at the Ethel Barrymore, under the direction of Neil Pepe). "Speed-the-Plow"—like "The Shawl"—is a play about belief, this time in the realm of golden idols and smashed dreams: Hollywood. When we first meet Bobby Gould (Jeremy Piven, making his Broadway début), he is sitting in an office that seems empty, despite the boxes and scripts littering the space. The emptiness is spiritual. Gould



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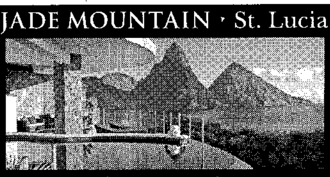

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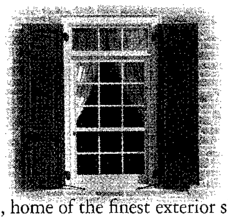

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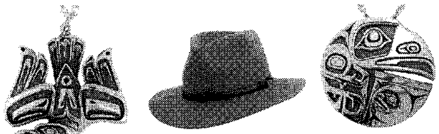

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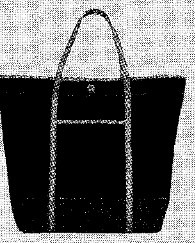

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is a craven young studio executive who's just been given the power to green-light any movie, so long as its budget is under ten million dollars. Anything higher and he'd have to go to Ross, his boss, for approval.

We learn this at the start of the play, in Gould's first conversation with Charlie Fox (Raúl Esparza), a less successful producer at the same studio, who walks into Gould's office with good news: the movie star Douglas Brown likes an action script that Fox has optioned so much that he wants to star in it, despite the fact that it can't be produced at his home studio. Fox wants the company to fund it. If the plan goes through, Fox will advance, and Gould will get points for bringing a surefire winner to Ross. Done deal.

In the movie business, to spare potential producers the burden of actually reading treatments, screenwriters, actors, and directors pitch their stories in person. Any hopes of getting a movie green-lighted hinge first on the pitch. Generally, the pitch is divided into three acts—just like a play. And, in a sense, "Speed-the-Plow" is an extended pitch, a vaudeville that borrows from the form it's lampooning. (In addition to his success in the theatre, Mamet has had a lucrative career as a screenwriter and as a film director. He analyzed the vicissitudes of the film industry in his excellent 2007 book, "Bambi vs. Godzilla.") Indeed, the characters in "Speed-the-Plow" don't so much talk to one another as try to sell stories—stories that morph into other stories.

As Gould and Fox get off on talking about their future glories and riches, they're interrupted by a hapless office temp named Karen (Elisabeth Moss), who ends up at Gould's apartment that night, despite her lowly position—partly because Fox bets his buddy five hundred dollars that he can't nail her. Dressed in a form-fitting black top and rosary-like beads that give her a nineteen-eighties Madonna look (Madonna actually played the role in the 1988 Broadway production), Karen is all lovely youthful zeal and earnestness. She wants to transform Gould from just another sleazy film guy into a sleazy film guy with a purpose. She thinks that, instead of making the action film, he should adapt a philosophical, apocalyptic novel that she has read for him, and Gould is so taken with her pitch that he decides, practically on the spot, to drop the Douglas Brown project and take up Karen's cause. Karen, however, is just another false idol; beneath her guileless exterior she's a disingenuous hustler.

Piven is a very good comedic actor, and this is his show; his Bobby Gould embraces his identity as an "old whore," even as he becomes more and more convinced that he should have loftier goals. Piven—who made his name as the high-energy agent Ari Gold, in the HBO series "Entourage"—doesn't take up as much room here as he does on television, which is as it should be. Acting big on camera, Piven pulls back onstage, and the subtleties in his performance are transfixing. Short and slight, greedy and vain, Piven's Gould is an insecure punk in a good suit who doesn't know which way to turn—or how to think for himself. Setting him free, at least intellectually, turns him into a more humane man, but a stupider one, blinded by his own pretensions. He has animal cunning but no depth. Still, he's not ashamed of himself, as he used to be: Karen validates him.

Both Esparza and Moss are perfect in their parts—Pepe does a credible job with the entire cast—but being perfect in their parts requires a certain superficiality. This is not the actors' fault; the roles don't lend themselves to nuance, and the performers are hostages to Mamet's sarcasm, which is sometimes a detriment to the drama. In "Speed-the-Plow," one of his lesser plays, Mamet maintains his distance from his characters, mocking their silly needs and their foolish talk. Watching Gould, one is struck by the disparity between his need to express desperation and the playwright's contempt for anything so puerile as fear. Piven's solid artistry deserves a deeper Mamet—the one who made "Homicide," in 1991, for instance, which is less a film than a kind of Kaddish for belief and the deadening cynicism that replaces it. ♦

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER

From the Grass Valley (Calif.) Union.

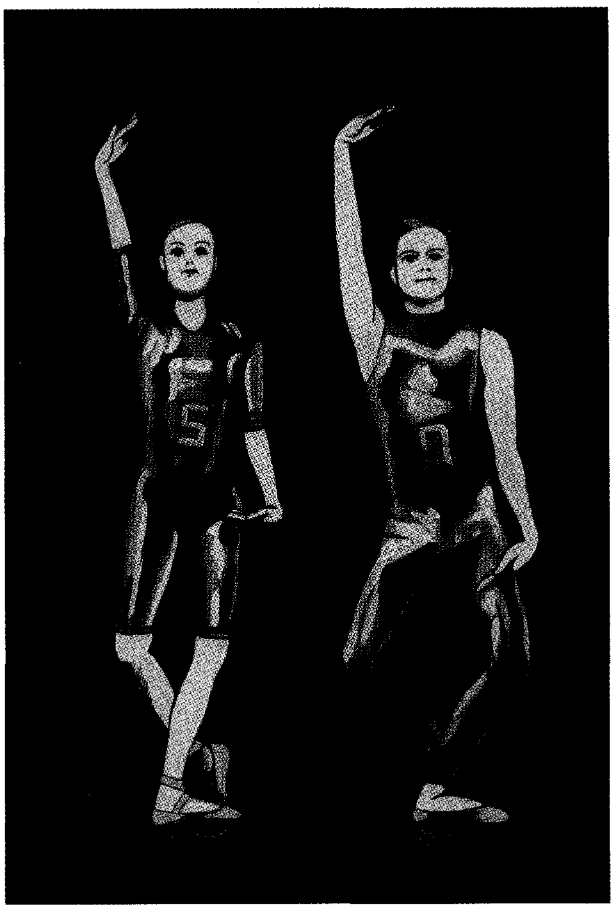
A caller from Vista Avenue reported a man was standing in his front yard and yelling. Responding officers found it was a man singing badly along with his iPod.

DANCING

PACIFIC HEIGHTS

Two former Balanchine stars and their companies.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

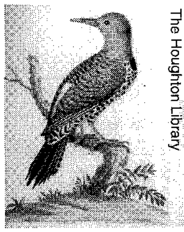


Members of San Francisco Ballet performing Mark Morris's "Joyride."

AKIKO KATO

San Francisco Ballet, America's oldest professional ballet company, is celebrating its seventy-fifth birthday with a big tour, which earlier this month included a stop at City Center. For the past quarter century, S.F.B. has been directed by Helgi Tomasson, and you can tell. Tomasson, born in Iceland, spent his early performing years in Denmark, a country whose ballet favors clear, buoyant, and musical dancing. Then there is Tomasson's own personality. His stage career culminated in a fifteen-year stint at New York City Ballet, during which time he occupied the sometimes undervalued position of "dancer's dancer." He was correct, honest, and unshowy—virtues dearer to experts than to the general public.

Before Tomasson, the co-director and trendsetter of S.F.B. was Michael Smuin, a cheerful vulgarian who had worked as a night-club dancer in his youth and liked razzle-dazzle better than classical ballet. When Tomasson was brought in to replace him, in 1985, Smuin's creations soon vanished, and a lot of his dancers also left, either by their own volition or by Tomasson's. This caused a scandal, and a great improvement. Those people whom Tomasson kept, he drilled; as for the vacated slots, he filled them with promising young dancers from far and wide. Today, three-quarters of the principal dancers are foreign-born. Miraculously, Tomasson has welded this collection of Spaniards



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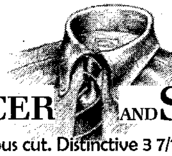

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and Russians and Pennsylvanians into a single instrument.

What unifies them is the golden mean that he himself once exemplified. The S.F.B. dancers are precise without being pedantic, happy without being sloppy. They seem to dance in Eden, where what was natural was also good. Gennadi Nedvigin, from Russia, has everything that Russian ballet can give you: not just the power but the meticulous placement, the little tilts of shoulder and chin. The big Armenian Davit Karapetyan is less picture-perfect, but he tries—sometimes, that's more moving than perfection—and, boy, is he handsome. Taras Domitro, a twenty-two-year-old Cuban, can do a slow pirouette in fondu attitude (that is, with both legs bent—very hard) with only a hint of a frown. In his major assignment this season, that of Melancholic in Balanchine's "The Four Temperaments," he was not comfortable, but he had no reason to be—when I saw him, he was doing this famous role for only the second time—and he gave it everything he had. The Melancholic soloist, to show his sorrow, has to perform huge backbends. Never before, in my experience, has anyone folded his spine backward like Domitro. We looked straight up his thorax; we could have given him a bypass operation. Some of the women, too, are knockouts. The sensation of the season was the new principal dancer Sarah Van Patten. When she did grands jetés, people got out of the way.

The company has a fault, which reviewers have been pointing out for years: the dancers have difficulty rising to heroic roles. In big, pompous Russian-style pieces, such as Balanchine's "Diamonds," they look a little like ballet-school recitalists. In dark, psychological works, like "The Four Temperaments," some of them smile. They don't seem to realize what's going on. This is a problem especially with the women. They lack diva scale, and they probably always will, because that is the flip side of their virtues, their normalness and balance. How many thunderstorms were there in Eden? It is worth noting, however, that the resistance to the high style shows up primarily in Tomasson's own ballets and in the company's versions of Balanchine's ballets, which Tomasson presumably coaches. When an outside choreographer comes in and makes a teeth-gnasher on the dancers, they remember how to do that kind of thing. Among the pieces shown at City Center was Val Caniparoli's "Ibsen's House," about the playwright's heroines—Nora Helmer, Hedda Gabler, Rebecca West—and the trouble they had with those stiff-necked Norwegian men of theirs. The San Francisco women, almost gratefully, it seemed, kicked and thrashed and fell on the floor—the whole vagina monologue.

Tomasson is a responsible company director in that, while his guest choreographers are making ballets at the command of their muse, he is often making ballets in response to his company's internal requirements. A young dancer needs a challenge; an old dancer needs something nice and easy; a star dancer, passed over by the visiting choreographers, needs something to salve her self-esteem. Or some department of the troupe needs bragging about. The City Center season included two Tomasson ballets that, if I am not mistaken, were made for such reasons. "Concerto Grosso," to Francesco Geminiani, was a virtuoso act for five men, three of whom, in the performance I saw, were not principals but only soloists or corps dancers. "Look at my company's men!" Tomasson was saying. "The Fifth Season," to a jazz-inflected score by Karl Jenkins, was apparently a gift to Yuan Yuan Tan, for whom it has a big, melting duet. Tan, a favorite in San Francisco, is less loved on the road (she is presentational, a sort of ballet-competition type, exactly what the company isn't), but not for want of Tomasson's trying to sell her.

Such duties—and, we must assume by now, his own inclinations—have turned Tomasson into a boring choreographer, classical in the pretty, empty, everything-is-beautiful-at-the-ballet manner. He unquestionably knows this, and it helps to explain why, in bringing in guest choreographers, he favors the hairier types. On the City Center schedule was the Finnish choreographer Jorma Elo's well-named "Double Evil," a piece whose sole purpose, I believe, was to humiliate its women—they were dragged around with their butts in our faces—and thus, apparently, to show Elo's high-minded indifference to ballet decorum. Also in the hip category was "Fusion," by Yuri Possokhov, a former star of S.F.B. This ballet set four Sufi dervishes, undulating their torsos, against four disco types, doing a sort of would-be up-to-the-minute jazz dancing. By the end, the fusion of the title had occurred. The disco folk were rocking their torsos like the Sufis. They had learned the wisdom of the East.

It tells you something about the current state of classical dance in our country that these two men have important jobs in American ballet—Elo is the resident choreographer of Boston Ballet, Possokhov of S.F.B. Actually, the United States now has a number of superb classical choreographers, and that number is four: Christopher Wheeldon, Alexei Ratmansky, Mark Morris, and Twyla Tharp. Tomasson has employed them, too, or the first three. Right up there at City Center, with "Fusion" and "Double Evil," pieces so bad they made you want to cry, were beautiful ballets by Morris and Wheeldon. Wheeldon's "Within the Golden Hour" was a sort of Orientalist fantasy (the verdigris costumes were by Martin Pakledinaz), pinned down, in the middle, by three ingenious pas de deux. At the very center was a fascinating, neurotic duet for a woman who took any pose she was placed in and a man who, after placing her, gazed off into the wings, as if in search of something more interesting. This piece is a marker in the history of Wheeldon's exploration of ambiguous psychological states.

As for Morris's ballet, "Joyride," its score, by John Adams, was a riveting, propulsive composition with percussion sounds you've never heard before. The costumes, by Isaac Mizrahi, were high-gloss gold and silver unitards, with little L.E.D. screens, broadcasting numbers, on the chests. The dancers looked like Times Square, and that was appropriate to Morris's blunt and witty dance. In it, a woman who has to leave the stage as another arrives gives her successor a cold stare before exiting. Another woman takes a heroic pose on the floor, like the Prometheus at Rockefeller Center; then she gets up and walks out as if she were going to the ladies' room. Meanwhile, the eight dancers' occupation of the stage space—four against four, one minute, three against three against two, the next—creates a busy dynamism that absorbs these jolts. The dancers are not people, or even dancers, but an idea: urban glamour.

Suzanne Farrell, like Tomasson, is a veteran of Balanchine's New York City Ballet, a more famous one. She was the greatest ballerina of the late twentieth century, and a wild thing. "I dance for God," she once said. And so, when it came time to parcel out jobs to the people who would carry on Balanchine's legacy, she was not chosen. The ballet boards wanted someone who would think about them, and the audience. God could wait. Finally, Farrell was invited to create a small company at the Kennedy Center, in Washington, D.C., but she is on a short leash there. The Suzanne Farrell Ballet is a pickup operation, employing its dancers for only a few months of the year—which, because members of big-time companies are not allowed to run off with Suzanne Farrell when they feel like it, means that her dancers come from lesser troupes. "She's working with schoolgirls and soloists from all over the map," Alexandra Tomalonis wrote in the Washington *Post* in 2002. Things have got better since then. Still, a lot of people shivered when it was announced that, in October, she was going to mount Balanchine's "Liebeslieder Walzer," a ballroom ballet, for four couples, that requires not so much a strong technique (which her people have) as an adult understanding of the exultation and suffering that come with a major case of love. Strange to say, Farrell's dancers managed it—a tribute to her coaching. People around me wept.

The San Francisco dancers speak to you like figures out of a Renaissance landscape—the shepherds and soldiers and reapers who invite you, if you wish, to see what they are doing. Farrell's dancers address you as if from a Renaissance portrait, commanding you to appreciate the unparalleled drama of their life on earth. Both approaches are needed, to have a complete world. We should love them both. ♦

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

LET'S PUT ON A SHOW!

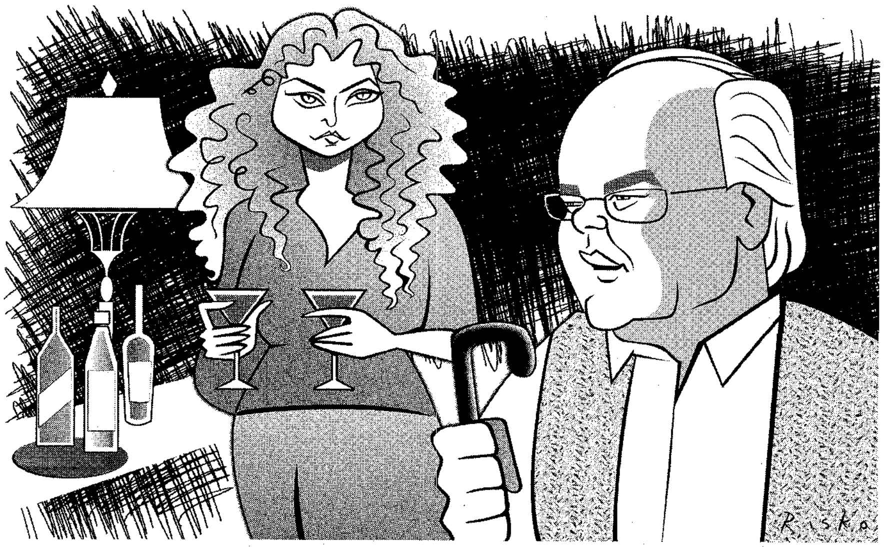
"Synecdoche, New York" and "High School Musical 3."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The hero of "Synecdoche, New York" is a theatre director named Caden Cotard (Philip Seymour Hoffman). He runs a successful troupe in Schenectady—so successful that he receives an award from the MacArthur Foundation, giving him carte blanche to unleash his genius at will. This is a rare palliative for Caden, the rest of whose existence is a rash of displeasure and doom. His wife, Adele (Catherine Keener), is a painter of canvases so minuscule that viewers must wear magnifying spectacles to see them. She is also a top-class moper, sprawling across the couch when they go to counselling. "Can I say something awful?" she asks the therapist, a blonde of terrifying perkiness named Madeleine Gravis (Hope Davis), and then reveals that she fantasizes about her husband's death. "Do you feel terrible?" Madeleine asks Caden, as he digests this news. "Yup." "O.K., *good*."

Such is the way of this unusual film. It sets up, in the person of its central character, a monolithic desolation, and then spends two hours capering around it, so that we emerge, at the end, not quite sure whether to feel toyed with or ground down. No one could accuse the director, Charlie Kaufman, of lacking ambition. Few directors these days, especially in America, are willing to roll up their sleeves and grapple with existence, mortality, creativity, love, and the gulf where love was meant to be. There are constant hints of the cultural company that Kaufman hopes to keep; Hazel (Samantha Morton), who runs the box office at the theatre, and for whom our hero nourishes a fitful passion, informs him that she has just read "The Trial," and is then seen grazing the first page of Proust. Nor is it an accident that the play that Caden stages, at the start, is "Death of a Salesman." Its worn-soled sadness, as well as the insistence that "attention must be paid" to the Willy Lomans of this world, carries over to the movie's closing act, in which Caden declares his faith in extras, bit players, and other unregarded folk—"They're all leads in their own stories," he says.

And what a lot of stories there are. With the MacArthur award, Caden initiates a soaring project. Instead of simply directing a play, he takes possession of a vast, cavernous shell in the city and slowly—horribly slowly—sets about constructing the last word in theatrical happenings. It is decades in the making; a script is followed, yet we have no sense of its having been written down; and most of the dramatis personae seem to be based on real figures in Caden's life. Hazel, for instance, is represented by Tammy (Emily Watson), and Caden himself by a benign beanpole named Sammy (Tom Noonan), who has been following Caden for twenty years, as if researching every inch of the role. Of course, once Sammy intrudes on Caden's consciousness, he, too, requires a dramatic counterpart, so along comes *another* beanpole, and when Sammy is unavailable *his* duties are bravely assumed by Millicent (Dianne Wiest), an actress who looks and sounds nothing like Caden—and so on and on, with every twist in the film sprouting such instant recurrence that it appears no more open to closure than the working out of pi. Here's the question, then, that must dog any approach to "Synecdoche, New York": the fundamental things apply in this movie, for sure, but do they stop it from vanishing up its own fundament?



Samantha Morton and Philip Seymour Hoffman in Charlie Kaufman's movie.

ROBERT RISKO

Kaufman has not directed a film before. He remains best known for the scripts that he wrote for "Being John Malkovich" and "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind," both stronger works than this, although his fondness for freakish patterns has hardly deserted him. From the title onward ("synecdoche" sparking against "Schenectady"), it crackles with crossed wires. Caden, sent to an ophthalmologist, hears the word "neurologist" instead. "I think I have blood in my stool," he later tells Adele. "The stool in your office?" she asks. The first thing to note about this exchange is that it's not very funny; Kaufman's film, for all its sophistication, is oddly fond of poop jokes and, indeed, of poop shots. Is there really no better way to dramatize the frail health of your character than by showing the discolored stream of his urine? The problem is not one of bad taste, to which the director is welcome, but the obviousness—dare I say, the dullness—with which he nags away at the sight of debilitation, in body and spirit alike.

There has long been a strain of sorry lassitude in Kaufman's work, and here it sickens into the morbid. Although Philip

Seymour Hoffman appears in almost every scene, he is seldom given the chance to shrug off his blue mood and demonstrate the dazzling range of which he is capable. One longs for the Hoffman of "The Talented Mr. Ripley," all crowing tones and carroty crew cut. I have heard him, in an interview, say how freed up he felt by that film's director, the late Anthony Minghella, but Kaufman seems to be following the reverse procedure. Such zip as we get is provided by performers in the secondary roles, notably the women: Dianne Wiest, Emily Watson, and, phlegmatic as ever, Samantha Morton. (The best gag in the film is that Hazel's home is forever on fire; she lives there quite cheerfully, never explaining the flames, and barely noticing them. Buñuel would be proud of her.) To what end, however, are these actresses devoting their panache? In short, what is "Synecdoche, New York" about?

Well, there are three commonplaces on which it repeatedly riffs. One is what you might call the romantic-pathetic theory of imagination: any alternative reality that we design and furnish, when we conceive a work of art, is always to some extent a stand-in for the puny or pitiful one that we have been personally landed with. The second and most imperishable truth is: we grow old, and perish. And the third says: all you need is love. These are noble principles to pursue; unless the pursuit is waged with gusto, however, it threatens to slump into the sententious, and that is what happens here. With so much screen time being allotted to Caden's bad marriage and pustular health problems, his majestic production doesn't get going properly until the second half of the film, and by then we don't care enough (worse still, we don't *know* enough, such is the vagueness of its guiding rubric) to mind whether it triumphs or flops. Compare Dennis Potter's great miniseries of the nineteen-eighties, "The Singing Detective," and you will see much the same setup—a wry leading man with a skin disease, inspired by a furious creative itch—rendered with unstinting vigor. And, should you still have a taste for the fancies of a fading man, try Orson Welles's "The Immortal Story," or a little picture of his called "Citizen Kane," all of which, I sometimes think, could be floating within Kane's cranium, like snow inside a globe. In each case, there is joy—not just a mournful snickering, as carried in Charlie Kaufman's bag of tricks, but the breath of divine pleasure—in the conjuring of dreams. If you want to show a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, go right ahead, but give that hour all the life you can.

Do you crave some of that tension, Kaufman style, between the actual and the theatrical, but without the screwy stuff? Feel like trading East Coast gloom for the Albuquerque sun? How's about a title you can understand *and* pronounce? It's all there in "High School Musical 3: Senior Year." For anyone with an allergy to television, I should explain that the first two installments of this epic were shown on the Disney Channel in 2006 and 2007 and sold around the world: a brilliant outwitting, I thought, of the traditional process known as cinema. It was something of a shock, then, to find the third panel of the triptych being displayed on the big screen. After all, its winning formula is driven not by narrative but by what isn't there: no sex, no drugs, and no rock and roll—unless you count the logjam of thundering power ballads.

Have no fear. Troy (Zac Efron) is still at East High, with his wistful determination and his killer eyebrows, like a younger and more huggable Leonid Brezhnev. His girlfriend, Gabriella (Vanessa Hudgens), is heading for Stanford, although this means leaving Troy, a decision that even Aeneas found hard to make. Also on hand are the cheery Chad (Corbin Bleu), the bitchy but bearable Sharpay (Ashley Tisdale), and the truly astounding Ryan (Lucas Grabeel), who dresses like Kurt from "The Sound of Music" and wants to be a choreographer, and don't you *dare* read anything into that. With the help of the kindly drama teacher (Alyson Reed), a ringer for Mrs. Doubtfire, the students do what Caden Cotard tries to do: they mount a stage spectacular, playing lightly heightened adaptations of themselves. Unlike Caden, they pull it off. They even have fun, something that never crosses Caden's mind, and, in so doing, they give excellent value for money, launching into song the way that normal folk go to the bathroom—regularly, politely, and because, if they didn't, well, darn it, they might just burst. Troy's only complaint, like that of an heiress in Edith Wharton, is that he lacks room for maneuver. "Do you ever feel like your whole future's laid out in front of you?" he asks. Given that "High School Musical 4" is already in the works, the answer, kiddo, is *yes.* ♦

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VOLUME LXXXIV, NO. 35, November 3, 2008. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 11 & 18, June 9 & 16, July 7 & 14, August 11 & 18, and December 22 & 29) by Condé Nast Publications, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Drew Schutte, vice-president and publishing director; David Miller, associate publisher; Terese Cunningham, advertising director; Norman M. Miller, advertising director; Maria Tenaglia, advertising director; Suzanne Reinhardt, director of finance and business operations; Daniella Wells, associate publisher of creative services and marketing; Jacqueline Cinguina, executive director of marketing and integrated strategy; Alice McKown, executive director, creative services; John Rice, executive creative development director; Lynn Oberlander, general counsel. Condé Nast Publications: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, president and C.E.O.; John W. Bellando, executive vice-president and C.O.O.; Debi Chirichella Sabino, senior vice-president and C.F.O.; Jill Bright, executive vice-president/human *resources. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration* No. 123242885-RT0001. Canada Post: return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

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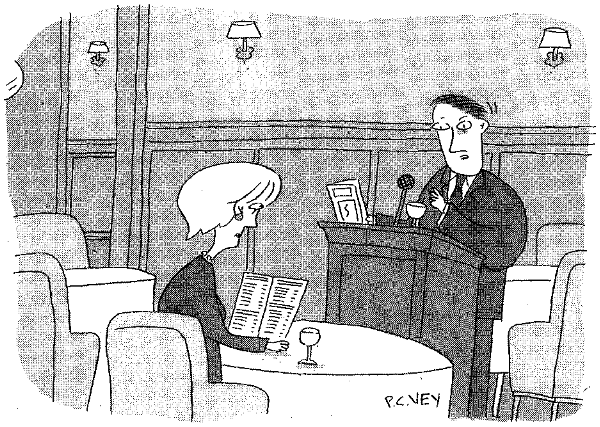
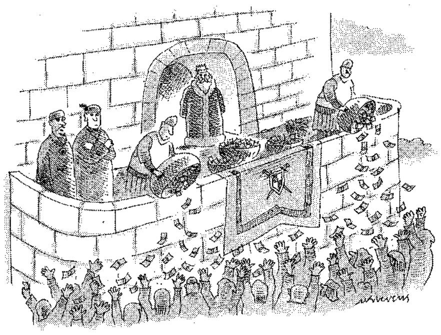
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Frank Cotham, must be received by Sunday, November 2nd. Finalists in the October 20th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the November 17th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"And, if you elect me, all Americans will be able to choose soup and salad!"
Peter LaMassa, Massapequa Park, N.Y.



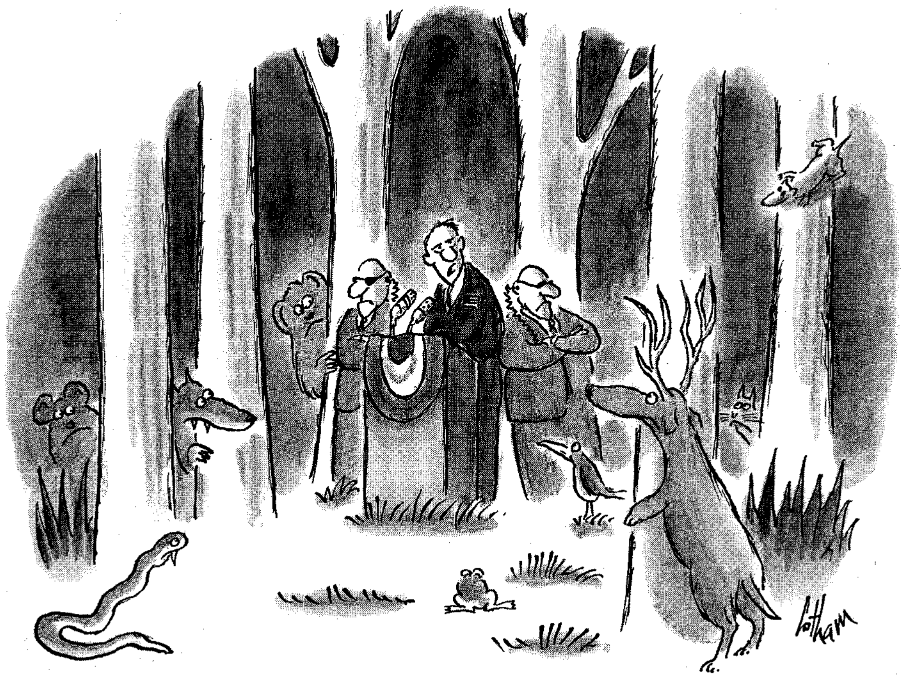
THE FINALISTS

"Looks like another ye olde stimulus package."
John Burke, Park Ridge, Ill.

"Things haven't been the same since we began electing our kings."
Jay Mackro, San Juan Capistrano, Calif.

"After seven hundred billion for the nobles, it was the least we could do."
Rich Brown, Tampa, Fla.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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